The true test is when they buy it a second time

JOHN FREDERICK, FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE, MAX BRAND, HARLEY P. LATHROP, RAY HUMPHREYS AND OTHERS

MAR. 12, 1927
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Every Week

Western Story Magazine

BIG, CLEAN STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

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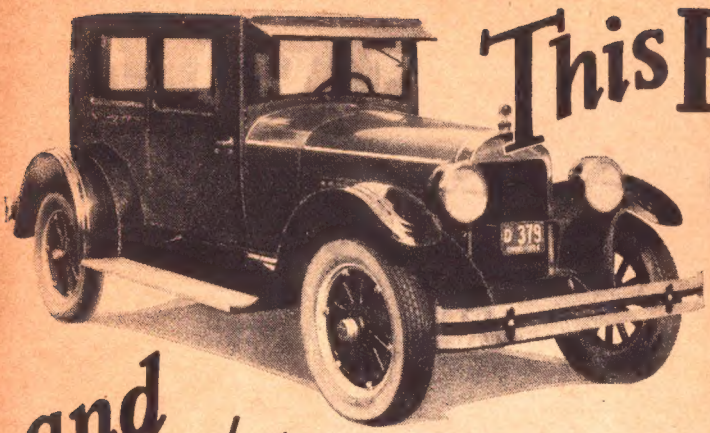

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Vol. LXVII Contents for March 12, 1927 No. 6

ONE NOVEL

Lightning Lumberjacks . . . *John Frederick* . . . 3

TWO SERIALS

Silvertip's Cub . . . . . *Frank Richardson Pierce* . 62
A Three-part Story—Part Three
Smiling Charlie . . . . . *Max Brand* . . . 96
A Six-part Story—Part Five

FOUR SHORT STORIES

Lamed by Quartz . . . . . *Harley P. Lathrop* . . 48
Mule Managed . . . . . *Ray Humphreys* . . 90
Silver Glance . . . . . *Reginald C. Barker* . . 112
Fashion Note for Cowboys (Poem) . *S. Omar Barker* . . . 119
Snakes' End . . . . . *Edward T. Glynn* . . 123

ONE ARTICLE

Pioneer Towns of the West . . . *A. V. Strope* . . . 120
(Glendale, California)

MISCELLANEOUS

Owner of E. P. Ranch Plans Visit 89
Indians Helped Through Winter 89
Reducing Montana Buffalo Herd 95
Plane Crashes into Oregon Mountain . . . 95
A Montana Gold Strike 111
Old-time Placer Miner Passes On 122
Idols Indicate Ancient Race 122
Ups and Downs of a Western Gold Seeker . . 132
Destruction of Wild Fowls in the West . . . 140

DEPARTMENTS

Miner's Potlatch . . . . . *J. A. Thompson* . . . 130
The Round-up . . . . . *The Editor* . . . 133
The Hollow Tree . . . . . *Helen Rivers* . . . 136
Puzzling Trails . . . . . *Prosper Buranelli* . . 139
Where to Go and How to Get There *John North* . . . 141
Missing 143

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BY

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Western Story
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Vol. LXVII MARCH 12, 1927 No. 6

Lightning Lumberjacks

By John Frederick

Author of "Western Tommy," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAKINGS OF A FIGHT.

UP in our part of the world we used to say that the reason that Jimmy Clarges and "Soapy" Almayer teamed it together and were such good partners was because they were afraid not to be friends.

I mean that each of them could lick all the rest of the world, you understand. And each of them *had* licked all the rest of the world, as you might say. All that was left was each other. I wasn't on hand when Clarges came hunting for Almayer to get his scalp, and when Almayer came clean across the mountains to eat up Clarges. But they met one day in a little one-horse town, and the minute that they laid eyes on one another, they began to slow up.

And you wouldn't wonder!

Each of them was made just opposite. I mean that Soapy Almayer was four and a half inches above six feet in height in his bare feet, and he weighed two and a half hundred pounds. And he was blond and handsome in a sort of a terrible, bold way, if you know what I mean. And Jimmy Clarges was three inches under six

feet, but still he weighed a shade more than Soapy. He was not fat—just knotted and deformed with muscle. His hands came nearly to his knees. No neck could hold his head. It just was laid on his shoulders like a bowl on a shelf. And he had a long, lean, ugly, pale face down to the jaw which was made like the prow of a battleship.

Soapy was kind of glorious, and Jimmy was kind of nightmarish.

There was a sad look in the eyes of each of them, folks said, until they met one another. There was a sad look, the saying went, because neither of them could find a man to fight.

But, when they saw each other, the sad light went out of their eyes. It wasn't a question of one of them backing down. It was just a question of each of them seeing that the other was dynamite. And not even a fool will step on powder.

So they began to team together, and what they did in company was to be told, but hardly to be believed. Most story tellers like to have a theme so that they can expand on it, but there was no question of expanding on Almayer and Clarges. You had to trim your story fine and undershoot the mark, or else the folks that didn't know about the pair would laugh in your face.

I'd heard about them, of course; but I'd never seen them, till one day they walked into the lumber camp, along about evening time. They came out of the woods like a pair of bull moose. They walked up to the superintendent and asked for a job.

"Do you know timber?" says he.

"No," says Almayer.

"Can you pick up ideas?" said the big boss.

"No," says Almayer.

"Then what can you do for me?" the boss demanded.

"Work," says Almayer, and he held out his hands.

Gloves were never made that would fit Almayer. The boss looked down at those hands, and then he looked at the shoulders of Clarges.

"I guess I can use you," says he.

"We guessed that maybe you could," said Soapy.

Not boastful, you understand. Just stating the facts! And when they got started to work the next morning, we saw what they meant.

They couldn't be given the jobs that required skill, but there is plenty of "horse work" around a lumber camp. And I'll never forget when the pair of them was given a big saw and told to get to work with it.

In a few minutes they quit, and Almayer comes to me, for I was straw boss over them and some others besides.

"Me and Jimmy are getting cold working that little saw," says he. "He'll take that saw for himself. Gimme another one, kid."

I gave him another one, and he set to work. It was tough, pitchy pine that a saw of any kind hates to work through. There was plenty of flaws and streaks and knots in that wood. And two men had plenty of work dragging a saw through. But not these fellows!

I watched Clarges pumping a white stream of sawdust out at either end as he whipped the big saw through the trunk. And it cost him so little effort that, as he worked it, he began to sing. It was not a smooth voice, but out there in the woods it sounded like an organ blowing.

It drowned the whining and groaning of the saws; and pretty soon, over the bass of Clarges, Almayer struck into the chorus with a really fine tenor-baritone that made the echoes ring, you bet!

They sang, and they worked. And every hour each of them did what would have been a full day's labor for

any other strong man. I never saw such a pair.

When noon came, they came in for chow, and then all of us could sit around and wonder for a different reason. Almayer took two quarts of baked beans and a loaf of brown bread for a starter. Jimmy Clarges sat down to a gallon of mulligan. And they polished off their portions and then came back for more. Each of them ate like three men, and the big boss says to me, "We can't feed those fellows! They'll eat us out!"

"Let 'em eat," says I. They'll turn all that fodder into energy before the afternoon is over."

They did, too, until Soapy's saw got stuck. He gave it a jerk and a lunge, and that tough steel blade snapped square off. He came to me carrying the fragments.

"Have you got a real, man-sized saw?" says he.

Well, that was the way that they started in the camp. We learned the very first day to respect and to value them. And before the week was over, we accepted them as fine fellows.

Friday night, a big Canuck came into camp full of moonshine and started to make trouble. He tripped around the circle over the feet of the jacks, cussed them off, told what a great man-eater he was, and begged somebody to come out and fight him.

There were men in that camp that would have fought the Canadian, but they didn't step out. They waited, because they felt that this was no time for them to do the hero act. And pretty soon the Canuck came to where Soapy Almayer was lying rolled in a blanket, asleep.

He hauled off and kicked Soapy.

"Get up, you fat pig! Fight!" says he.

Soapy sat up, took the Canuck by the collar and the seat of the pants and chucked him through the air like a sack of bran to where Jimmy Clarges was sitting.

Jimmy stretched out his arms and gathered the Canadian in.

"Throw this rubbish away for me, Jimmy, will you?" says Soapy.

And he lay back and went on with his nap.

Jimmy Clarges stood up.

It wasn't the difference in weight. That big Canuck must have been within fifteen pounds of Jimmy, but he had turned to pulp under the grip of Soapy. And now Clarges just grabbed him by the neck and dragged him out of camp. And the Canuck hung limp, screaming for help.

Clarges took him to the bank of the river. We heard a splash, and we knew that the Canuck had had a chance to cool off his moonshine in water fresh from the snows.

But neither Clarges nor Soapy prided themselves on that. They never referred to the Canuck again, and, when anybody else mentioned him, they yawned.

No, we liked the pair of them fine. They were big without being overbearing; and they were strong without taking advantage of anybody.

I mean that they didn't take advantage of anybody in important things. But, just the same, they had a rather irritating way until you got used to it.

They took certain things for granted. They felt that the best place on the windward of the fire ought to be theirs, and that they should be allowed to sleep an extra hour in the morning, and that they should have the grub that they wanted.

The pair of them had what they wanted, without no questions asked, until another gent came into camp and started trouble.

Certainly you never would have thought, to see him, that he was the man to make trouble for a pair of giants like Almayer and Clarges.

He was about five feet eight, I suppose; but, up there in that lumber camp, where the smallest men shaded six feet, as a rule, he looked hardly more than a boy. Some of the fellows started calling him "Skinny," but that was changed to "Shorty," and he was let down at that.

He was right off the range, wearing high-heeled boots and a neckerchief and all the rest; and, though he took off his gun belt after the first day, and put off his holster, too, still you could always see the bulge of his Colt on him, where it was stowed away under his clothes.

You take a cattleman, and he ain't happy without a gun. Deprive him of his gun, and it's like robbing an ordinary man of his eyesight or his hearing.

Shorty got a job and stuck to it. He was very quiet and made no trouble at all until the third day, I think it was, after he arrived, when lunch time came.

That was the main meal; and, along about twelve, you would see the lumberjacks coming in from the woods, with the steam from their nostrils floating behind them in the crisp, mountain air. And right in the first of the rush was sure to be the pair of giants, shoulder to shoulder.

That day, the pair of them was a little late for some reason; and, when they came in, they found that the bench opposite the center of the table was sort of full. Soapy found room to squeeze himself in; and Jimmy Clarges took the next man under the armpits and lifted him right off the bench and sat down in his place, saying, "Give a man room, kid, will you?"

The rest of us sort of grinned, seeing Shorty snatched out of his place, that way; but the next moment we stopped our grinning, I can tell you, because Shorty's voice barked sharp and high, like the voice of a terrier. "Stand up, you fat-headed sap!"

CHAPTER II.

THE PROMISE OF TROUBLE.

YOU don't know how it sounded. It made me want to laugh, until I craned my neck and saw the twisted, white face of Shorty. He was frantic.

But what could he mean by fighting?

We saw in another minute, for Soapy picked up a half loaf of bread and chucked it over his shoulder, saying, "Eat that, kid, and don't talk foolish!"

That bread was stopped in mid-flight through the air and came right back at Soapy. A gun had jumped into the hand of Shorty and spoke; and, as that half loaf glanced off the head of Soapy and tumbled onto the table, we couldn't help observing the hole that was blown through it.

A .45 chips out a pretty big chunk, where it lights. And, just then, that hole through the loaf seemed to me like a bullet through a man's vitals.

I looked at it and looked at Shorty, then I looked back at Soapy. No, it wasn't any joke. There had been gunfighters around that neck of the woods before, but there had never been a fellow who could snap a gun out of his clothes and pop small things as they drifted across through the air.

Soapy turned around with a roar, leaped out of his place and started for Shorty.

But Shorty didn't run. He stood in his tracks with fire in his eyes and the gun hanging at his side.

"Get out your gat, you thickheaded bull!" he yelled at Soapy. "Get out your gat because, if you try to handle me with bare fingers, I'll tear you to pieces."

But Soapy didn't pause. He couldn't. And you couldn't imagine a giant like that really pulling up at all on account of such a little thing as a revolver!

I expected the next minute to see that gun's muzzle twitch up, and a jet of

smoke and fire dart from it. But the gun didn't stir. There wasn't time, for, just then, a shadow sailed in between Soapy and the kid.

It was the big bench, which the men had jumped up from, and which Jimmy Clarges had heaved up to help his pal. That bench hit Shorty and bowled him over, while the second bullet from his gun punched a nice, clean hole in the blue of the sky.

Then he lay still, and Soapy ran on and picked the kid up in his arms.

"What d'ye mean?" he yelled to Clarges. "What d'ye mean spoiling my little parties?"

"You fool," said Clarges, "ain't you ever going to learn that a Colt ain't a popgun?"

"What could it have done to me—a little thing like one bullet?" asked Soapy Almayer. "And here you've killed the kid, sure!"

By the ugly look of the blood that was streaming down the face of Shorty, you would have said that that was the case, and that the kid was done for; but, when we swabbed off the blood, we saw that it was only a shallow scalp wound just above the forehead. Then he came to, and he came to raging.

He reached out for his gun, no doubt. And then he saw that he had missed his Colt and, at the same time, he laid eyes on Almayer.

You would have thought that he had gone mad, to hear the yell that he let out. He wriggled right through my fingers, very snaky and fast, and rushed for the giant.

Yes, sir, tackled him barehanded!

It was an amazing thing to see! Soapy reached out a hand to brush Shorty away, as you would have brushed away a fly; but the cow-puncher dipped under that swinging arm and rammed four full-speed punches into the pit of the big boy's stomach as fast as he could slam them. Then, as Soapy tried to gather the kid in, Shorty ducked out again, and the spat of his knuckles on the face of Soapy was like the clapping together of bare hands.

They were not easy punches, either! When a man knows how to hit, he can hurt any one in the world, no matter how big. There was a snarl beginning to form in the hollow of Soapy's throat. In another moment, I suppose that he would have clinched with the kid and smashed him, but here the big boss stepped in and laid a hand on the kid's shoulder.

Shorty tossed him a glance; and then lowered his hands.

"He insulted me," said Shorty, his face twitching. "And now I get a chance to fight him, or I'll know the reason why!"

"Leave him go," said Soapy, nodding. "He's a game little chicken, and I won't hurt him. Let him have his place on the bench, if he wants. He deserves it!"

And he felt one of the bumps that was rising on his face and laughed a little. It just tickled him, you could see, to think that any man had dared to stand up to him.

"I can have my place, can I!" snapped the kid.

And then he whirled around and pointed a finger at Jimmy Clarges.

"You're on my books, too, you lump of nothing!" said he.

Oh, he was in a fighting humor, that Shorty was; and it did me good to listen to him rip into the pair of them. But then the big boss led him away. I went along.

The boss said, "Kid, you're game, and you had something to fight about. But you're wrong, just the same."

"Show me where!" said Shorty.

"Clarges and Almayer mean no harm. It's only that they have an overbearing way with them. Besides, I don't allow guns in this camp!"

"Then I'm through with your camp and you, too!" said Shorty. "And tell

the pair of them, after you've paid me off, that I'm going to trim them down to the quick. I'm going to make them wish that they'd never seen my face!"

The boss tried to smooth him down, and said that he didn't want to lose him, and that we all respected him for the way that he'd acted, and that Almayer and Clarges respected him, too. But that wouldn't work. Nothing would please that kid except a chance to fight it out with the pair of them.

"Give 'em to me one at a time," said he, "with knives, clubs, or anything they please. Or with a gun, I'll take on the pair of them."

Nothing else would suit him. He even offered to fight them barehanded. But, of course, the boss was too sensible to allow that. So he had to pay off the kid, who went away through the woods, the hottest youngster that you ever seen in your life.

Says the boss to me, "This ain't the end of this fracas. We'll hear some more about Shorty before we're done with him, and I'd like to bet that we curse the day that we ever saw him!"

I felt much the same about it, because there was distilled essence of poison in that Shorty. He meant mean work, and I didn't doubt that he would find some way of harming all of us.

I never guessed, though, the way that he would choose. None of us could do that, it was so roundabout and clever.

After Shorty left, things settled down in the camp and went along extra fine and smooth. Almayer and Clarges had had a lesson that did them good, and, from that time on, they didn't rough the boys or shoulder them out of the way at all. They seemed to understand that mere bulk was not all that there was to a man. In the meantime, they worked harder than ever. They had picked up a lot of the tricks of the lumber trade by this time.

How much they added to the good cheer of that camp it would be hard to say. For one thing, there was no lack of men in the camp that season. Usually, the boys fell away when the cold weather hit us; but this season, there was a steady drift of gents up to the camp, eager and anxious to have a chance to see the two giants. And, after they came, they stayed, because it was a sight to see Almayer and Clarges, or to hear them sing, or to watch them eating more like a pair of horses than a pair of men.

In fact, we had to be turning hands away all of the time, and the work was pushed ahead with a vim that surprised me. I had been five years on that job, and I'd never heard of such progress as was being made now. The big boss laid it all to Almayer and Clarges.

Of course, we got a nickname for them. Saying their names, one by one, was too hard work for a Western memory. And one day, when they were singing together in the distance, with the chime of their axes clinking in between in rhythm, a lumberjack sang out, "Listen to thunder and lightning!"

It did make you think of that—the bumbling and rumbling of Clarges' bass, and the higher, cleaner-cut ring of the voice of Almayer.

After that, we called them "Thunder" and "Lightning," and a good name it was for them. It hitched them up proper, and, from that time, they were never known in any other way through the lumber camps, and over the whole spread of the cow camps in the lower hills.

So we went along with everything as merry as you please, until, all at once, the trouble hit us. No, not all at once, but gradually.

Who ever heard of an invitation to a dance being the start of fighting?

That was the way of it, however. Because one day an old chap rode a pony into camp and sang out, at lunch time, that down in the town there was

a dance the next Saturday night, and would us boys come down? They were bringing up a lot of extra girls from all over the range; and it was thought that there would be two hundred couples dancing in the assembly room of the old town hall.

It sounded good to us. It sounded terrible good. And, from that time on, there wasn't much except waiting for the day of the dance, you can bet!

And Almayer and big Clarges?

You would think that they would never dream of stepping out like a couple of elephants on a dance floor and two-stepping or waltzing with a girl.

But that's where you would be wrong, as we were all wrong. No really little man seems to know just how foolish and small he is; and no really big man seems to know just how foolish and big he is!

CHAPTER III.

A STUDY IN COSTUME.

SATURDAY evening there was a rush through dinner. Nobody seemed to care much what sort of nourishment he got. And, when we were all turned out for the dance, we got a sensation that staggered us a mite. When we were all tumbling into the buckboards which the big boss had supplied to cart us down to the dance, out came big Soapy and Jimmy Clarges, side by side, and they were dressed up like a pair of band wagons.

Jimmy had on golden-red corduroys, while his trousers were shoved into red boots. It looked like there must have been a whole calfskin used for the making of each of those boots. He had a great, blue silk sash around his waist, a shirt of yellow silk, too, and a red-and-blue necktie.

Well, when Jimmy stepped out in that outfit, you could see him clear enough. You didn't have to have him pointed out to you, as that being the man! You could have seen him through a fog. You could have heard him like a church bell, he was that loud.

But everything goes by comparison; and, compared with Soapy, I got to admit that Clarges was sort of pale and insignificant. I would hate to say that he didn't amount to nothing; but the fact is that it was pretty hard to see Jimmy at all, when he was walking along there with his friend.

For one thing, there was a lot more of Soapy. I mean, looking up and down, there was. There was just as many square yards of surface on Jimmy to take your attention; but Soapy was loftier. He could carry his flag higher, as you might say.

Well, on the top of that head of his, set onto the pale-golden hair that he had and wore long, Soapy had a purple cap, round and sort of woolly, and there was a long, yellow tassel to set it off and flop around, when he talked or shook his head, or anything like that.

That was just the beginning of what Soapy had on. He wasn't wearing long boots, like Jimmy. But somebody had come up through the mountains selling shoes made of a kind of soft, yellow leather. They were comfortable and fitted fine, but they didn't last long. But Soapy had polished up those boots of his and worked over them, until they shone like they had been varnished. And almost the first thing that you would see about him would be the two spots of yellow—one on top of his head, and the other on his feet.

Not that there wasn't other things to see in between his head and his feet. Soapy had a dead-black suit. It was the blackest and the deadest-looking thing that you ever saw, and, under the coat, by way of a belt, he wore a broad, orange scarf. And, since he always kept his coat open, the thing that you saw all the time was sure to be an

orange scarf. I never saw such a color. There was a blue shirt on Soapy that was pretty intense. You could see it by its own light, so to speak. And there was a scarlet tie around his neck that talked for itself, too. But nothing seemed to matter, somehow, except that flaring, flaming, burning sash of orange that he wore around his middle.

It was just as though you had picked up a great, big banner of living fire and knotted it around the middle of big Soapy Almayer.

They were pretty conscious that they were magnificent. The pair of them looked down very kind and patronizing on all of the rest of us. It seemed like Soapy had some more finery left in his bedding roll. He was a good-natured gent, with a heart as big as a mountain, and he just couldn't stand seeing the boys of his own camp fixed out so cheap and poor as we were. He wanted us to go right over to his roll and there to help ourselves to anything that we could find. And Clarges offered the same.

I managed to duck them by saying that it was late already, and that we'd better start.

So off we rolled down the mountain, along what was called a road by the grace of God and a sense of humor.

Jimmy and Soapy were, of course, sitting side by side. I was behind them and could watch what was going on. They loved each other better than brothers, you had better believe. But, just now, they were envying each other so bad that they could hardly stand it.

What would make them jealous? Why, there was one thing on each of them that seemed to bust up his pal. The fine, shining boots of Jimmy Clarges was what made Soapy groan. And Jimmy, when he looked at that orange-colored belt of Soapy's, could hardly stand it. He just shook his head and looked sick.

"I cottoned to that sash the first time that I saw it," said Clarges, finally. "I might have known that I needed it. But who will look at a sawed-off runt like me, unless I got something to set me off and catch the eye, so to speak? But I left you to buy that scarf, Soapy, because it got your eye!"

"H-m-m!" said Soapy.

There was a long silence, so gloomy that pretty soon I thought that there would be a smash between the two of them, and it made me hang onto the edges of my seat, fearing that that pair of giants might grab one another and manage to wreck us all in their struggles.

But pretty soon Soapy says: "I would sort of be ashamed, Jimmy, to envy another gent some little thing that he might happen to have. I would sort of be ashamed, if I had what you got."

"What have I got?" says Jimmy.

"Now," said Soapy, "you are leading me on, and all the time you're pretending that you don't know. But you *do* know. And this here dodge won't work."

"Soapy, old man," said Clarges, "I give you my word that I dunno what you're speaking about. I never was fixed up so miserable for a long time, when going to a party."

"Bah!" says Soapy. "I suppose that those boots of yours ain't anything at all?"

"These?" says Clarges.

And he stuck out his leg, big and thick as the trunk of a tree and hard as iron with muscle.

"These little, old boots?" says Clarges, wondering. "I dunno that any one would notice them!"

"They've got the world beat, those boots," said Soapy; and he sighed again.

Pretty soon there was a sudden start from Jimmy. Then he leaned over and worked for a minute. After a while he sat up with a grunt. He had peeled

off his boots, and now he handed them across to Soapy.

"Here, kid," says he. "I couldn't get no happiness out of them boots now that you've taken to hankering after them."

It amazed me a good deal to hear that. And Soapy, he was like a sick man.

"What you doing, Jim?" says he. "Put them boots back on, will you? Put them back on. Why, darned if you ain't shaming me, Jimmy. How could I be taking the shoes off of your own feet?"

"I'll wear yours, and glad to have 'em. I always had a hankering after yellow, old boy."

"Do you mean that?" asks Soapy.

"I give you my word."

"Solemn and faithful, kid?"

"Sure."

"I think you're a liar, Jimmy."

"Soapy, old heart, I mean it. I would be the happiest man in the camp, if you was to let me have them yellow shoes of yours."

"I'm a mean, low skunk to do this," said Soapy. "But if you really think that maybe you would just as soon wear these yellow shoes to-night—why, here it is!"

He yanked off his shoes on the double-quick, and Jimmy put them on. Soapy jerked on the red boots, and he sat and admired them for a long while. The gent that was sitting next to me in the buckboard, behind the pair of giants, he beat me black and blue, to keep me from busting out laughing.

"Wait a minute," says Soapy a bit later, as we was sliding in a broadside skid around the edge of the road and hanging on the rim of a precipice. "Wait a minute. Dog-gone me if I didn't forget something!"

"What is it, Soapy?"

"I forgot that you were admiring this here sash that I'm wearing. Here, Jimmy, you take this, will you?"

'Hey, Soapy, what you doing. Don't you be a fool. That there scarf is about the finest-looking thing that I ever seen you have on."

"Is it?" says Soapy with a sort of a groan. "Well, I don't believe you. I never liked this here thing; never give a hang for this sash. But it might look fine on you with your get-up, Jimmy. Here. You try it!"

"Soapy, if I was to get my hands on that scarf, I dunno that it would be at all easy for me to give it up, ag'in."

"Who would be asking it from you? No, you take that scarf and keep it."

"I'm a mean hound if I do, Soapy."

"You ain't nothing of the kind."

So pretty soon Jimmy Clarges took the orange-colored scarf and gave Soapy his own big, blue sash. They knotted those scarves around themselves, and they drove on very happy and hunkydory, and pretty soon they felt so good—one about the scarf, and one about the shoes—that they couldn't help busting into a song, each with his monster, big arm thrown around the shoulders of the other.

Down that mountainside we went with the thunder of that music around us, till we seen the lights of the town twinkle and then rise up before us. Then we were rolling through the streets of the little village, and gents were shouting to us from the sidewalks, and riders were swishing by, and rigs were rolling up and down, and you could just feel by the nip in the air that one of the best times that you ever heard about was coming up!

CHAPTER IV.

THE DANCE BEGINS.

THE town hall was a corker. It had been built when folks had an idea that Elk's Crossing was going to grow up into a real city, and so the miners were real forehanded, as you might say, and they arranged to have

a hall that would be able to house the most bang-up city government that ever was heard about.

They started right at the bottom and went up. At the bottom they had laid out a fine, big lawn that covered a whole square, and in the lawn they had planted palms and such like things. Then, in the middle of the lawn, they had laid out sites for two big fountain bowls, and in between the fountain bowls stood the building. It was square, and it had in front of it columns of real white, marble that was taken out from the marble quarry up back in the hills.

Well, the lawn was only working in patches, now. And the fountains were busted, and their bowls were filled with drift and blow-sand. The palm trees, they looked pretty meager, their heads were like a cabbage that a chicken has scratched to pieces.

But, just the same, with the night to cover things up, and with the lights flaring in the entrance, and the tall, white columns standing up big and grand before the house, it was a fine thing to see!

But then you got closer, and you seen the places where the plaster had peeled off, and you seen the cracks in the wall, and the ornery-looking people that were going in and out and standing smoking and laughing around the door, and you knew that, after all, this was where you belonged.

Well, it made quite some considerable sensation when Thunder and Lightning arrived. Everybody turned and stared at them, and, when the lights flashed over 'em, you had better believe that they were worth staring at! They walked into that courthouse like two pillars of fire, and the small boys of the town that were out watching the folks come and go at the dance, they made a rush and piled in after the pair of them, and followed Thunder and Lightning up the stairs.

It was a great show. Nobody was mean tempered about the kids breaking in. They just laughed and let it go, and kicked the kids out as hard as they could kick.

There were Thunder and Lightning standing at last in the middle of the assembly room in the courthouse of Elk's Crossing. It was a whopping, big room with a huge, high ceiling. The walls were so high that the ceiling looked hardly more than half as big as the floor! It was funny to stand and look at them.

Around the walls there were the chairs with the girls sitting in them. Some folks like the girls along the sea shore, the sailor girls, and such; and some take to the girls on the plains and the farms; and some have a fancy to the girls off of the cow range. But me, speaking personally, I say: Gimme every time the girls from the mountains, where a girl grows up tall and straight and not too talky; where, when she smiles, it means something; and when she laughs it pretty near stops your heart; and where every girl you meet don't look as if you could tell her that you loved her and get away with it. You know what I mean. Not that they were offish, but that they had some dignity. They weren't mulish; no, they were downright pleasant, but they had sense. In a word, they weren't just wall decorations; they were women!

I looked them over. There was a stirring and whirling around of men in front of them, men asking for dances and getting acquainted, and there were the floor managers hiking around and making introductions as fast as they could talk.

Well, when I looked over that open square of girls' faces, I leaned against the wall with one hand, and I fanned myself with the other. I felt like a kid that is brought before a Christmas tree all loaded down with wonderful

things and told to take his pick. Because they all looked so fine—those girls, I mean.

And just at that minute, as though they had been waiting for the arrival of Thunder and Lightning before starting, the orchestra hit up the first dance.

Well, that was some orchestra. I wish that you could have heard it!

The fat man in the corner was the drummer. And he had more noise-making contraptions than you ever heard in your life. Wonderful how he could work them, too. He could hit a bass drum with his heel and a gong with his toe, and a cymbal with his elbow all at the same time, while he was ringing a bell with one hand and beating a snare drum with the other and blowing a train whistle that was fixed between his teeth.

You see, there are some that can get to be musicians by a lot of hard work, you understand? And I admire them for their hard work, and all. But you take a fellow like that drummer, it was just plain genius. I got to take my hat off to a man like that.

He was pretty fat, and so, when he got sort of tired, he had a boy along with him to strike in and work the traps. The kid was clever, too, and had a fine teacher in the fat man. But work as he would, that kid didn't have the genius. He couldn't get the busts of noise in on the right spots, to help you around the corner with your girl, or to make you spin at the right time.

I wouldn't let you think, though, that that orchestra was made up of a drummer and nothing else. No, sir, that was really a mighty refined orchestra, as anybody could tell, because nothing but really swell orchestras have a violin and a flute in 'em. But this one did. And besides that, it had five other instruments, which was two real, bang-up sliding trombones and a saxophone that would send a shudder right down your spine, and a wonderful tenor cornet that you hear right over everything except the trombones, and in addition, there was a great, big bass horn that made the the floor tremble and turn to water under your feet.

Well, sir, that was the orchestra that struck up just as we entered and got a good look around us.

When the music started, you could hear a roar of feet on the stairs, as the boys all started on the rush to claim the girls that they had booked up dances with.

I didn't wait for that tidal wave to hit me. I ducked in fast. There wasn't much time for picking and choosing, but what was the need, when they was all so fine? I seen a girl with a blue dress on and freckles across her nose, and I sashayed up to her and says: "Your brother says that I'm to dance this one with you, Miss Gulliver."

"My name ain't Gulliver," says she. "And besides——"

"All right," says I. "No matter about a little thing like a name. I got to be seen by your brother doing my duty and dancing with a girl."

"But I ain't got a brother," says she.

"That's all right," says I, "Miss Gulliver has one."

"I don't understand you," says she.

"You will before the dance is over," says I, pulling her up out of her chair by both hands.

She was the owner of a plumb-crooked smile that knocked a dimple right into the middle of one cheek. Amazing!

She turned that grin loose on me, and my knees sagged.

"Besides——" says she.

But just then that blessed drummer, he hit an inspired place in his system, and uncorked a lot of whistles and bangs and whangs and bumps that just tickled a man's feet right into moving; and that girl, she couldn't help letting

me take her in my arms and whirl her away.

"You was about to say something," says I.

"I dunno what," says she.

"It begun with 'Besides,'" says I.

"Oh, yes," says she. "I was about to say that I couldn't dance this one with you because I had it already with another man."

"Hey!" says I, weakening a little, "Why didn't you say that before?"

It ain't an easy thing, when you cut out a cow-puncher from his dance. Most usually he wants to break you in two because of it.

But then I took another look at her.

"All right," says I. "I'll fix it with him!"

"He's a very mean man," says she.

"Oh, that's all right," says I.

She looked up at me and puckered her brows. And then the dimple sunk into one cheek.

It wouldn't of pleased her to see a couple of gents fighting about her. Oh, no. Not at all, it wouldn't!

"But," says she, "you belong to Thunder and Lightning, don't you?"

"Lady," says I, "what might your name be?"

"Jessica Long," says she.

"Jessica," says I, "don't you make no mistake. Thunder and Lightning belong to *me!*"

"Oh," says she, "are you one of the bosses?"

"I am," says I.

Well, she settled down into my arms and gives me a happy look as much as to say: "Let the world rip! I got what I want out of it!"

Women is that way; maybe you happen to know. I mean, they're sold out to gents that have got a position, or something. They like a gent that has got power.

Even a straw boss in a lumber camp is something.

That was me!

CHAPTER V.

CUT THE CARDS.

YOU would think that I had forgotten about Thunder and Lightning. But I haven't forgotten about them at all. I just wanted only to take things pretty slow and easy for a while. I wanted to show you about that girl, Jessica. I mean to say, she was a humdinger. She *is* a humdinger. I never have met anybody like her. She deserved a little space all to herself!

But now I'll get back to Thunder and Lightning and to something else.

While I was circling around the room with Jessica, hitting it up high and lively, over in a corner I saw a gent about average size, with widish shoulders and a mighty graceful way of dancing. He was got up modestly in dark clothes, with no smart dashes of color about him, but his easy way of dancing and something else about him made him quick to notice.

I seen his back first, and the face of the girl that was dancing with him. She was something extra. She was a cut above me.

What I mean to say is, Jessica was pretty, and all that, and dressed up fine, and a bang-up dancer. But this other girl, she was a queen. She had a pair of eyes that picked you up and set you down again; and she had a sort of a pale face, kind of Mexican olive, when you looked at it close; and very black hair—tons of it. But nothing that I could say about her would tell you what she was.

Maybe you have seen a good deal of horses. Standing together, they look pretty much the same, and you look over the lot and place your bets, but when they come out, and the race starts, you suddenly see one of them that has the action and the way of going and the looks all tied together, and you know that that's the winner.

That was the way with this girl. She

was the winner, no matter what sort of company she was placed in.

And just as I got over the shock of seeing her, her partner whirled her around, and I seen *his* face, and that was another shock, because it was Shorty!

Shorty there in the same dance hall with Thunder and Lightning! And Shorty of course had a gun or two stowed on his person. You just couldn't imagine that little fire eater without a Colt or two packed away on him.

Jessica seen that I was rather worked up, and in one glance she seen why.

"She's awfully pretty," says Jessica. "There isn't anybody else like her, is there?"

I mean, she said it without being spiteful, or without sort of asking you to praise her and run down the other girl. You see, that was the kind that the other one was.

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Rosita Alvarado," says Jessica.

"And what is the name of the gent that's dancing with her?" says I.

"That's Jack Thomas."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"No. He just hit town a few days ago."

"And what's he doing?"

"Working on the Alvarado place, riding range."

"You mean that's the daughter of his boss?"

"Yes."

"He seems to get along with her pretty well," says I.

"He's a grand dancer, ain't he?" says Jessica, looking him over. "I guess he's quite a man, maybe!"

Women have got an instinct to pick a horse. They've got an instinct to pick a man, too. And I knew that she was right, and that Shorty was quite a man. But, just the same, I was pretty sure that there was going to be trouble between this Shorty and Thunder and Lightning. I could feel it in my bones.

In the meantime, there was something else to think about. That was Thunder and Lightning themselves. They had got themselves partners, and they had stepped out to dance.

It was a funny thing to watch. Jimmy Clarges; he had picked out the tallest girl in the room, bar none. She stood just as high as he did, and her hair was worn piled up and made her look a good deal taller.

And along with big Soapy Almayer there was one of the smallest girls in the room. I don't think that she was an inch more than five feet, but she was mighty pretty and neat. And Soapy, you could see, was crazy about her. She was so small and he was so big that he had to bend over a lot to take hold of her. And she had to tilt back and look almost straight up to the ceiling to talk to him.

It made you laugh to look at them. But as she was dancing with a gent that everybody knew the name of, you could see that she didn't much care what sort of a picture she made with him. She was happy; and Soapy Almayer, he was just blind-happy with her.

"Ain't he a fine, big, simple fellow?" says Jessica to me, laughing.

"He sure is," said I.

And you could tell that everybody in the room had taken a liking to Thunder and Lightning.

But after that dance was over, I put Jessica into a corner. And I says to her: "Jessica, how are you staked out for this evening? Will you tell me?"

"I have got a pretty crowded program," says she.

And she looked up to me with a pucker in her forehead.

Says I: "Lemme see your program."

She gives it to me, and there it was, all lines and filled with names. There wasn't a single vacant space. And al-

most every other place was taken by "Charley."

"Who's Charley?" says I.

"Charley is an old friend," says Jessica, a little red.

It sort of stopped my heart. Charley —well, blast Charley.

And then I tore that program up and dropped it into my pocket.

"Good gracious!" says she, her eyes popping. "What have you done?"

"I'll tell you," says I. "While you was leaning at the window, over there, dog-gone me if a puff of wind didn't come along and snatch that program right out of your hand, and so you're all mixed up about your partners!"

"I don't know what you mean!" says she.

"Maybe you'll understand later on," says I. "Meantime, you just save every other dance for me. The ones in between you can scatter out among the rest of the boys to please yourself."

"Thank you," says she.

"Oh, that's all right," says I.

"And what might your name be?" says she.

"Jim Rankin," says I.

"Jim," she tells me, "of all the gents in the range, you're the sassiest that I ever did meet!"

"The dance after next is the first one that I come back for," says I, and I went off and left her.

Before I'd taken three steps a big chap comes up to me and glowers down on me, and he says: "Who might you be?"

Well, I didn't have to ask him who *he* was. It was Charley. And he was turned clean batty, he was so mad.

I looked him over, and then I remembered Jessica's dimple, and I decided that she was worth trouble.

"Partner," says I, "I take it that you're her man?"

"I dunno about that," says he. "But what I'd like to know is——"

"Hold on," says I. "We can arrange this here thing two ways. We can cut aces to see who leaves this hall to-night, or else we can step outside and shoot it out. Now, you take your choice."

He looks me in the eye.

"You're a crusty little hound," says he.

"I ain't so small," says I. "I look to myself big enough to handle you."

He just laughed down at me.

"All right, kid," says he. "I don't pull shooting irons for Jessica nor no other woman unless I have to. But if we can get a pack of cards, I'll cut with you."

No, he wasn't taking water. By the cut of him, I knew that he was a hundred-per-cent fighting man, and a good man, too. But he had a sense of humor, you understand? And that was what made him let me have my way.

We stepped back to a corner, and I pulled out a pack of cards. And he turned up the first one, and it was a jack of clubs. I turned the next one.

No, I didn't really turn it. I had learned a few little tricks with cards, and I'd fixed up this one on the way to the corner. I shook down an ace of spades out of my sleeve, and I seemed to Charley to be turning it over honest from the top of the deck.

He stared down at it for a minute.

"Well——" says he, and then he turned on his heel and left the hall.

Crooked? Sure it was a crooked trick that I pulled on him. And if you blame me a lot for it, that's because you haven't yet had a chance to see the dimple and the smile of Jessica.

I breathed a little easier, when that job was finished, and when I knew that I was going to have that girl pretty much to myself during the rest of the evening.

But I had other work on hand, and the first thing was to find Soapy.

It wasn't hard to find him. Where the densest part of the crowd was,

there was Soapy, looming a head above the tallest of them. And his shoulders looked like the shoulders of a plough horse. I walked over to him, gave him a signal, and he waded through the crowd to me and bent down.

"Soapy," says I, "you're knocking them dead with that fine get-up of yours."

"The boots, they ain't so bad, kid, what?" says he.

And he looked down and grinned at them, very admiringly.

"They're wonderful," says I, "and everybody is talking about them. But I got to tell you something else, old-timer."

"Cut loose, kid."

"There's some trouble here—trouble for you."

"Where?"

He looked around the room like a bull.

"Trouble that I want to steer you through. Will you let me?"

"Kid," says he, "you be the boss, and I'll follow!"

CHAPTER VI.

TWO LOTHARIOS.

HE had a kind of confidence in me, the big boy had, and now, as he looked down at me, I wondered if I really could keep him in hand and take him through this mess. I says to him:

"Soapy, I suppose that you ain't seen anything but friends up here?"

"Not a soul," says he. "Why?"

"Because," says I, "there's a fellow here that I think has got it in for you. How would you act if you was to see him face to face?"

"How would I act?" says he. "Why, I wouldn't act no ways. I would just bust him on the jaw!"

I couldn't help feeling a mite sick. The idea of getting busted in the jaw by the fist of big Soapy Almayer was a good deal like being smashed with an iron club. They said that he had killed a four-year-old maverick by hitting it in the head. I believed it. And what would have happened if he had slugged a mere man as hard as he could hit?

Well, I thought that over as I looked down to the big, balled-up fist of him.

"Old-timer," says I, "is this the sort of a place to have a fight in?"

"Why," says he, "I dunno that I've thought about that."

"I have, though," says I. "But maybe you're one of the kind that likes to raise the devil and shoot out the lights and scare all the women?"

"It's a lie, and a long-bearded lie at that!" said Soapy. "There ain't any truth in that at all!"

"You don't like to scare the girls?"

"Not a bit. Matter of fact, I'm real fond of the girls, kid."

"All right," says I, looking him in the eye, "I'm gunna try to believe you, but I got to confess that you scare me when you say that you'd hit a man if you met him up here in this hall, all filled with nice girls."

"I was wrong, kid," he admitted quick as a flash. "I was wrong, and I take it back. I'm having one fine, large time, right now, and I wouldn't let nothing interfere with it!"

"All right," says I, taking him at his word. "Over there is Shorty, that you had the trouble with in camp."

He walled his eyes in that direction, and, when he seen Shorty, his nostrils flared out, but then he grinned.

"What have I got agin' Shorty?" says he. "Shorty is all right. Shorty is absolutely O. K. as far as I'm concerned. We played a mean trick on him, by his way of thinking, and he stood up and sassed us for it. Well, that's all right."

"He punched you in the face, Soapy," says I, looking at the purple spots where those hard punches had landed.

"Love pats," says Soapy. "What did they amount to to me? Nothing at all! That's a game kid, and I sort of like him. Funny thing, though, about Jimmy Clarges."

"Hold on—what's he got so bad against Shorty?" I asked. Because I hadn't thought that Jimmy would make any trouble about Shorty at all—him having had the easy end of the fight.

"Well, sir," says Soapy, "Jimmy says that Shorty would have murdered me with his Colt, if he'd had a chance, and Jimmy takes that kind of hard. I dunno that he could keep himself from reaching out and tying the runt into a couple of knots if he was to see him up here to-night."

"You get to Jimmy right away," I says to Soapy, "and you explain what a terrible disgrace it would be for a gent to do anything like fighting up here, will you?"

He nodded and grinned and started away to find Clarges. I hadn't explained the most important thing of all to Soapy. Which was that if either him or Jimmy tried to put a hand on Shorty, they would probably get a couple of .45 caliber slugs of lead crashing through their midsection. I hadn't said anything like that, because if I had, the game might of looked sort of attractive to the pair of them. As it was, Shorty was just a foolish kid, game, but wrong, and they could afford to sort of overlook him.

You understand my drift, maybe?

Well, I watched Soapy go up to Clarges and hold him back from a dance and talk to him.

It made a wonderful picture, the pair of them togged out so gaudy, and with big Soapy draping his hand over the huge, wide shoulder of Jimmy, and Jimmy Clarges looking up to the face of Soapy like an ordinary man listening to a hero's voice.

Other people noticed that picture, and there was a chuckle and a shaking of heads all around the room. There was five hundred weight of muscle and bone standing together in that spot, with enough power to break open heads of men like walnuts, and it was sort of touching to see how plumb fond of each other they was, and how brotherly, and all that, you understand?

It was plain that Soapy was having a hard job of it, because Jimmy he kept shaking his head and frowning terrible black, but finally he begun to nod, and the pair of them set sail across the room, Soapy leading.

I seen that they was heading straight for Shorty, and I tagged along with my heart in my mouth.

I was up close enough to hear what was said. Shorty he got up and left the beautiful Rosita, and he stepped out and met them. Says Soapy: "Kid, are you here with hard feelings agin' us, or ain't you?"

Says Jimmy Clarges: "Are you friendly, or ain't you?"

Shorty he looked them over and up and down, as cool as you please, and he says to them: "Soapy, I'll never rest easy till I'm squared up with you. And the same goes for you, Clarges. Some day, I'll be even with you."

And, with that, he turned his back on 'em and walked back to Rosita Alvarado.

Soapy and his pal were dumfounded. I suppose that that little speech that they had made was the nearest to making a first step toward peace that either of them had ever made in their lives. And they couldn't understand how any man could be so plumb hostile and mean as to back-talk them after that fashion. Well, it took the wind out of my sails, too.

"I'm gunna go back and smash him,' said Jimmy Clarges.

"Hold on, Jimmy. He ain't big enough for you to hit," said Soapy.

"No," says Jimmy. "He ain't a man. He's an insect!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," says Soapy. "I'll get at him in another way. I see the way that I can hurt him most. Lemme talk it over with the kid."

He stepped aside with me.

"Kid," says he, "I've got the great idea for fixing that ornery Shorty."

"What is it?" says I.

"I'm gunna sashay in and cut him out with the girl," says he. "What do you say to that?"

Well, I swallered a laugh. Anybody that watched Rosita talking and smiling and blushing, would have figgered that she was pretty strong for Shorty. But it didn't seem to have sunk into the heart of big Soapy that way. He'd got a lot of attention, that night, and I suppose he felt that he was pretty near invincible.

So I just said: "You go ahead, Soapy. But don't you get downhearted and mad if she don't pay no attention to you, because maybe Shorty has poisoned her mind against you!"

"Maybe," says he. "But I dunno how a girl like her can waste time on a runt like him. I ask you personal and special, kid. Do you see how it could be?"

I kept a straight face, and I told him to go ahead and try his hand.

Then I started back for Jessica, feeling a lot better, because I allowed to myself that I had fixed things up pretty fine, and that there couldn't be no real trouble happen in the hall that evening.

Which shows that I was a plain fool and didn't realize that the worst kind of tragedies start in with smiles, and not with guns talking.

Before I could get to my place, I was stopped by Jimmy Clarges. He says to me: "Hello, kid. Wait a minute."

I stopped up, kind of nervous, because I could see a whole flock of gents coming around Jessica.

He says: "I've got an idea for getting level with that kid, Shorty. I want to hear what you think of it."

"Fire away," says I, wondering what could be in the head of Shorty. Because ordinarily he never bothered about thinking. He let Soapy do all of that hard work for him.

Jimmy says: "What put the hunch into my head was this: I seen what a fine, all-around looker the girl with Shorty is. And I says to myself: Is he worthy of her? No, he ain't. Then why should he have her? He shouldn't. Then why shouldn't somebody else pry him away from her? Why, there ain't any good reason against that, is there? No, no good reason at all. And who's the man to be? Why, the first come the first served. And opportunity, she never comes more'n once a day. Y'understand? Why shouldn't I go in there and try to cut him out?"

He wasn't quite as sure of himself as Soapy. But it amazed me to see that both of them had worked things out in the same way. No, it didn't amaze me none. Matter of fact, if you had one good look at the face of Rosita, you would have wanted to try just the same thing, and I suppose that there was a hundred men in that hall that would have liked to cut loose at her. But, when a girl gets to be just *so* pretty, she holds a gent back. Because you figger that some other gent he must surely have the inside track—somebody a lot better and smarter and richer than you are. Y'understand how it is? It was that way with Rosita. There was nobody that bothered her much. Chiefly just Shorty that was always around her. And all the rest of the boys held right back.

And so Jimmy and big Soapy had both got the same idea.

"What sort of a chance do you think that I would have?" says Shorty, looking down to his big, flashing sash.

"The finest chance in the world," says I. "You go ahead and win."

I might have said something better than that. I might have tried to persuade him not to make a fool of himself. But the fact was that I wanted to get rid of him quick, so that I could have a good laugh at him. I couldn't hold in no longer. So I sent Shorty away to try his hand, and I sashayed on up to Jessica, who was just standing up on the floor with a gent, and the music was beginning with a bang and a whanging on the traps.

"Hey, Jessica," says I, "are you going to quit me on this here dance?"

"Oh," says she, blushing real hard. "That terrible program. I've just mixed everything up by losing it. Is this really your dance?"

"It ain't nothing else but," says I.

CHAPTER VII.

SHORTY GOES HOME.

THERE was a trail of black looks that followed me from the rest of those gents as I danced away with her.

"I'll tell you what," says the girl, "I don't think that this dance belonged to you at all!"

"Well, sir," says I, "it sure does to the best of my memory, and a man can't do no better than that!"

She looked straight and steady at me.

"I think you have a *bad* memory," says she.

"I got one of the worst in the world, except about you," says I, and I got such a good memory about you that I couldn't forget a single thing."

"You think that I'll believe that?" says she, frowning. But she didn't mean the blackness of her look.

"I've got you all wrote down," says I, "from the color of your hair and your dimple to the size of your slippers."

"Well," says she, "I'll tell you what —a girl can't believe a single thing that you say!"

"Hello!" says I. "And why not?"

"Because a girl hears you telling fibs to other men."

"Men don't count," says I.

"Only the girl, I suppose?" says she.

"Not them either. You're pretty near the first one that I ever talked to, Jessica."

"Kind of a wild and lonely life you've led, maybe?" says she.

"Terrible," says I.

"In a wilderness," says she.

"Just about."

"And what did you learn to dance with?"

She nearly had me there, but that blessed drummer, he whanged the bass drum just then and when the booming of it died away I said: "You see, I was raised up with a mother and a lot of aunts, and such."

"Ah," says Jessica, "I'll believe that."

"Thanks," says I.

"I've seen a lot of the boys learning to dance with their mothers and their aunts.

And she grinned up at me, and I grinned back at her. It was easy to see that she understood, and that I understood, and everything was pretty fine and happy. I couldn't help laughing. We swung around that floor like we was on skates.

"Look!" says Jessica, all at once.

I looked. There was big Soapy stepping out with Rosita. Yes, sir, there he was as big as life, and with his fine red boots flashing, and his long sash tail flaring out behind him while he stepped away with Rosita.

I couldn't help staring. I really hadn't figgered that he would be able to get a single dance with her, because somehow from a girl like that, you didn't think that she would let herself be made to look sort of funny dancing with a big lummox like that. But there she was, looking as contented as you could wish.

Then I took notice that Soapy didn't look so foolish, neither. I mean to say, he was wonderful light on his feet. You would expect that he would take such big strides around that he could hardly keep time. But he didn't. He come in with a click on every beat.

Rosita Alvarado was tall, too, which made the pair of them look all the better. And take it by and large, Soapy looked pretty gaudy, but not bad at all.

"Well, I nearly twisted my head off my neck, looking at them. And so did everybody else in the room.

And then I says: "Where's Shorty?"

"Who do you mean?" says Jessica.

"I mean the gent that was dancing with her before."

"Jack Thomas?"

"Yes."

"Well," says she, "I don't know where. Gracious, I hope that he hasn't left the hall!"

"Why? What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Why, if he's left the hall, it means that he's angry because she's dancing with Soapy Almayer."

"What of that?" I asked her.

"Don't you know anything about Jack Thomas?" she asked me, leaning back in my arms, and frowning up at me.

"Not much," I told her.

"Well," she said, "there's a lot to know. If you was to go down into Arizona, maybe they would tell you quite a lot!"

I said: "Thomas is a gun fighter!"

"Nothing but!" said Jessica.

"How many has he got?" says I.

"I've only heard of five men that he's killed," says she. "Is Soapy Almayer a friend of yours?"

"He is," said I. "He sure is, and a white man, at that."

"Mostly," says Jessica, "I think that Jack Thomas has left the white men alone. He's done a lot of terrible things among Mexicans and Indians, but the white men—well, he's only killed five of them. But I don't suppose that there's any one in this room foolish enough to want to make Thomas hostile."

She added: "You look dizzy, Jim!"

I took her over to a corner, and we sat down together.

"Tell me," says I, "is this Thomas really a bad one?"

"I don't know," says she. "He's new on the range and in this part of the world, and we haven't heard very much about him——"

"Just about the numbers of men that he says he's killed?"

"Oh, no," says she. "But there was a man who came through here from Arizona, and he saw Shorty Thomas, and he told what he knew about him. That's all."

Well, it made me pretty sick, as you maybe can imagine. I sat there and held my head in both my hands. And I thought that I could see the finish of the whole miserable business. I could understand why it was that Shorty had got into a rage when he'd been picked off his place on the bench that day in the camp. You couldn't expect a bang-up gunfighter that didn't fear anything in the world to take water even from a pair of giants like Soapy and Jimmy. What was size to him? The bigger the man, the bigger the target!

"What's wrong?" says Jessica and touched my arm.

Just then a gent come up and asked her for a dance. She only stared at me, very cut up.

"Go ahead and dance, Jessica," says I. "I got trouble on my hands."

Well, off she sailed with that puncher, but her glance was fixed back at me, and at any other time it would of pleased me a whole lot, the attention that she was paying to me, y'understand. Just then, I was too worried to pay much heed to her and her nice ways.

Well, up comes Jimmy Clarges, just then, and he says to me, very black: "Say, d'you see what's happening?"

"Hello, Jimmy," says I. "What do you mean?"

"Soapy!" says he.

"Well?"

"He's double crossed me."

"How come?"

"How come?" says Jimmy, getting madder and madder. "Well, ain't he stepped in and cut me out with that girl?"

"Hello!" says I. "Is that the way of it? Look here, old-timer, what's he done?"

"He's dancing with her."

"Did you tell him that you wanted to stake her out?"

"Well, no."

"Then how d'you expect him to know what's going on in your mind?"

"He always knows everything that I'm thinking about," said Clarges, with a sigh. "He always knows! And he knows now!"

"I wouldn't say so," said I. "You wait and think this over and give yourself a chance to cool off, old-timer, will you? You'll find out that Soapy didn't really mean no harm to you!"

"I hope so," says he. "I would take it pretty hard, to think that he would really have it in for me like that. Think of it, kid! In all these here years, we've never had no trouble with each other—not so much as one word of trouble!"

"You won't have any now," I told him. "Why, old-timer, all that he means is just what you mean—to cut out Shorty with his girl."

Well, Jimmy was a prety slow-headed fellow, as you can see for yourself. But now his face cleared.

"I guess you're right," says he. "Sure you're right! Old Soapy he wouldn't try any tricks on me. But—wait a minute, kid, and tell me something."

"What's that?"

"Think it out for me. Now that he's danced with the girl first, have I got any right to ask her to dance with me afterward?"

Well, sir, it struck me all in a heap—it was so stupid, and so good natured, and so faithful! More like the way that you would expect a favorite horse or a dog to think. I couldn't help liking Jimmy Clarges for it, even while it was hard to keep from busting out laughing at him.

"You go ahead and dance with her if you can," says I to him. "I wouldn't worry about anything. Soapy, he's got a lot of sense. He wouldn't care. And if he did, you could smooth it out with him in two seconds!"

"Are you sure?"

"Dead certain. Only—you won't be offended and make a lot of trouble if the girl can't dance with you? Because she's apt to have her program plumb full!"

He said that he wouldn't, and that he would just take his chance on her liking him well enough to dance with him, and crowd him into a place on her program.

Well, sir, off he went, and I forgot the trouble that I was in about them long enough to see him rambling across the floor in the general direction of the place where Soapy was bringing the girl back, after the dance.

When I seen that, I ducked out of the dance room, and laughed all the way down the stairs.

But, while I was laughing, I was looking, and I didn't see no sign of Shorty.

I went on outside, and there I looked up and down where the gents was standing around the horses, but there was still no sign of Jack Thomas.

"Partner," says I to an iron-faced cow-puncher that was leaning against a tree smoking a cigarette. "Partner, tell me, did you ever hear of a gent by name of Jack Thomas?"

He give me a side look. He was one of them slow kind that think before they speak, and then think again.

"Some," says he at last.

"You know him?"

"Some," says he.

"Have you seen him around here?"

"Yes," says he.

"Then where is he? Around the side of the courthouse?"

"No," says he.

"Out there in the sheds?"

"No," says he.

"Maybe he's stepped across the street to where that hot-dog stand is?" I suggested.

"No," says he.

"Well, where the devil *can* he be?" says I.

"Home," says the iron-faced gent

"Home!" says I.

He didn't say nothing.

"You seen him ride away from here?"

"Yes," says he.

"Thanks for all the information," says I, a little peeved.

And I turned back into the courthouse again, more worried than ever by a whole pile.

If he'd gone home that meant something, and it might mean something important.

I says to some one: "Did Thomas' boss send him home?"

"Thomas? Old man Alvarado ain't here."

"The foreman, then?"

"Foreman? Why, Thomas is the foreman, old-timer. Maybe he sent himself home!"

And he busted out into a horse laugh.

CHAPTER VIII.

JIMMY GETS A DANCE.

ME, you can bet that I didn't laugh none. Not me! It turned out that Thomas was the foreman of the Alvarado place. Well, that meant that he was somebody of some importance, and not just a mere gun fighter, and that made things all the worse. You take a fellow with brains and get him mad at you, and it's twice as bad as if you was to get a mere ordinary fighter sore. Jack Thomas was mad. There was no sign of a doubt about that. He had gone home himself, and nobody had had the authority to send him. He had gone off and left somebody else to have the pleasure of taking Rosita home to her father's ranch.

Well, it made me feel pretty miserable. I didn't have the least doubt that Thomas had had a fight with Rosita, and that it was on account of big Soapy. And I didn't have the least doubt but that he'd gone off to plan how he could have revenge on Soapy.

And then, as I stepped into the dance hall again, I wondered to myself why it was that I had to do all of the worrying, and why couldn't somebody else take the affairs of Soapy and Clarges on their own shoulders? And wasn't Soapy and Clarges themselves men enough to handle their own things in their own way?

So, with the music blaring at me, and the slide trombones working overtime, I walked into the hall, and right away quick I found Jessica. And she found me, and smiled at me, like an electric light turned on in a dark room.

It wasn't no trouble at all to take her away from her crowd of gents and get the next dance.

"I've been terribly worried," says she.

"About what?"

"About you! Is there anything wrong?"

"Nothing much."

"There is, though. And don't tell me that you're going to have any trouble with that awful Jack Thomas!"

I told her that I wasn't. And then we forgot ourselves and had just a plain, fine time, dancing. But, as we

pulled into the middle of the dance, I seen something more to give a man the staggers. Yes, sir, right out there in the middle of the floor was Jimmy Clarges, dancing with his head throwed way back, and a grin on his face, and his eyes half closed, like he was so happy that he was drunk. And all around him there was a big empty space coming from folks having collided with Jimmy two or three times and getting wrecked, and realizing that it was foolish to let him jostle them. Nudging Jimmy was like nudging the shoulder of a granite boulder, he was that solid; and his idea of dancing was to go where his feet took him, regardless absolute of how many other folks was standing in his way.

It was a scream to watch old Jimmy Clarges dancing, but that wasn't all. The girl he was dancing with was something. Yes, sir, maybe you have guessed it already, but the fact is that he was up there dancing with the queen of the mountains—Rosita Alvarado!

I looked at Jessica, and I asked her: "How come this, Jessica? How does it come that Rosita Alvarado is dancing with a big ham like Clarges?"

"Why," says Jessica, "a girl always likes to dance with a famous man, and Thunder and Lightning are both famous, aren't they?"

"I suppose they are," says I, but still I didn't think that it was enough of an answer.

"I'd dance with either of them myself," says Jessica.

Well, she would, too, being a happy-go-lucky, free-swinging sort of a girl. But then she wasn't like that Rosita Alvarado. There wasn't anything queenly about her.

I finished off that dance, and hardly had a chance to get my girl seated when Soapy came up to me in a white heat.

"I guess you seen that? I guess you seen that?" he stammered at me, wild with rage.

"What in the world have I done to you, Soapy?" says I.

"You? Who said that you had done nothing to me? It ain't you, it's him!"

"What him?" I asked.

The low-life, wall-eyed, flat-footed skunk," says Soapy.

"Who you talking about?" says I.

"I'll turn him inside out and see what makes him tick! I'll bust him in two!" says Soapy.

"You'll bust who?"

"He's double crossed me."

"Who in the world do you mean, Soapy? Nobody would dare to double cross you!"

"You'd think that he wouldn't dare," said Soapy, "him that I've taken care of like a baby all of these years, and worked over, and done his thinking for him, and slaved over him, and took care of him like he was a baby. But he ain't no baby, either. He's just a snake in the grass, I tell you!"

Well, sir, I begun to see what he meant.

"Wait a minute, Soapy, are you talking about Clarges?"

"The rat-eyed, sneaking coyote!" says Soapy.

"Hold on, Soapy, tell me what he's done to you?"

"He took my girl!" says Soapy. "Look at him over there now, grinning and gaping at her. He took her away from me. He sneaked in and grabbed her away from me, just because I'd told her some kind things about him, or otherwise she never would of wasted a second look on such a cow of a man. He ain't a man. He's an ox. No, he ain't an ox. An ox is too stupid to be mean. He's a——"

I got more and more scared.

"Look here, old-timer," I said, "will you please listen to me?"

"Kid," says he, "you're the only one in the world that I *would* listen to. The rest of them are crooks and sneaks, but you, I'd listen to. Tell me what I can

do to him, outside of just wringing his head off his shoulders for him?"

"Soapy, you're all wrong."

"I'm what?"

"You're wrong. Will you let me tell you what really happened?"

"Go on—go on!"

"It was this way. When you started in to dance with Miss Alvarado, Jimmy Clarges he just took it for granted that he should be able to dance with her, too. Like two brothers would go and dance with the same girl. And I'll bet that he ain't been doing a thing but telling her yarns about what a wonderful gent you are!"

"Wait a minute!" says Soapy. "That idea never come into my head!"

He wasn't a fool, by any means, old Almayer. He was just pretty slow in the head.

"It's the straight of it, though," I told him. "Absolutely the straight of it."

"I believe you, dog-gone if I don't," says he.

Then he gives a wriggle.

"Look at him, though. Like a grinning baboon, and not like no man whatever!"

Matter of fact, that was just about what Jimmy Clarges looked to be!

"Don't you worry none," said I. "He's tickled to death that you got him to know such a fine girl, but the last thing in the world that he would want would be to offend you, old-timer. I know him too well to expect that, and so do you, if you'd sober down and think it over for a minute! Why, old man, he loves you better than a brother. He's always looking up to you!"

Soapy let out a few more reefs of madness, and gives a sigh. "I thought that I would have to break him up," said he. "And I been keeping myself from that all of these years."

"He's just a simple old chap," says I. "He don't think so fast and straight as you do, Soapy. You got to have patience with him. Otherwise, he would of asked your permission before he danced with her. She looked like she liked you a lot, Soapy."

"Would you say that?" says he.

"Oh, yes! She was smiling all the time."

"Smiling, was she?" says Soapy, pretty contented. "Yes, I suppose she was." He waited for a minute, and then he added: "I got an invite out to her father's place!"

"Go on, Soapy!"

"I did, though!"

"Old man, you're a fast worker," I told him. "The fact about her and Jimmy Clarges must be just that she took pity on him, him being a friend of yours, as she knew."

"Sure. I couldn't help mentioning his name a couple of times to her."

"It's all as clear as day. He don't mean any harm."

"I'll take it up with him," says Soapy.

That scared me.

"Don't you do it!" I told him. "You just let the matter drop. I wouldn't say not even a word about it, if I was you. But I wonder at you, Soapy, the way that you get on with the girls!"

"You seem to find yourself at home, kid," says he. "And she's a fine looker, too."

"Not in a class with your girl," says I. "Hurry up and get another dance, big boy. We got to be starting back, pretty soon!"

And away he went, with his head in the air, all smoothed out and happy again.

CHAPTER IX.

SOAPY MEETS CYCLONE CHARLEY.

IT wouldn't have been hard for me to have laughed at the idea of those two big boobies that was wasting their time on nonsense, and in getting jealous of each other, while there was a

hundred-per-cent, sure-fire gun fighter waiting to murder 'em both.

What good would it have done to have warned them? No good at all. There wasn't any fear in them. And a fight against a gun would just be an old game for them. Many a time gents had yanked out Colts while arguing with Thunder or Lightning, and many a time the guns had been taken away and shoved down the throat of the gun fighter.

But there is men and men, and chiefly there is nothing much more different than an ordinary puncher, say, and a real gun-fighting fool.

I didn't need nobody to tell me that Jack Thomas was one of the last kind. He had the steady eye. And I'd seen him show his nerve. He wasn't the man to hold his fire until the last minute—and then miss the mark. Killing a man—if it came to that—would be no more to him than shooting a jack rabbit; he'd just be careful to pick his mark right. And what chance would the pair of the giants have against him?

Well, the rest of that evening went off in a dark haze, for me, with only a streak of light, now and then, where I seen the face of my girl. She was fine and kind and said I'd better go home and not stay here to be made miserable by something, she didn't know what. But I *had* to stay!

And a mighty good thing that I *did* stay, I can tell you, because in the finish there was a fine, large chance for a fight between that pair of hams. About one in the morning, Rosita got up to leave, and who, I might ask you, was the gent that took her home?

No, you wouldn't really guess. But I'll tell you. It was Jimmy Clarges, with the floor grinding and screeching under his tread, as he went out with his head in the air.

Big Soapy leaned against the wall for a minute, pretty faint, and I hurried over to him.

When he recovered, he made a wild lunge to follow them, but I hung onto him.

"Where you gunna go? Where you gunna go?" I kept asking him.

"I'm just gunna murder that sawed-off cartoon of a man," says he.

"Wait, Soapy, and tell me what's the matter?"

He stopped dragging me toward the door, all at once.

"No," says he, grave and sober as you please, "I ain't gunna spoil her clothes and her good time by splashing blood all over her. He ain't worth that much notice."

"You're right, Soapy," I told him.

"Sneaking in on me like that, the hound!"

"He's just doing it out of compliment to you, Soapy. I swear that's what he means by it."

Soapy give me a queer look, with his forehead all wrinkling up, as much as to ask himself, was *I* mixed up in this here plot against his happiness?

But in the meantime, what stuck in my crop, as they say, was the way that the girl had sashayed out of the room on the arm of Clarges, seeming as contented as could be, and smiling and chattering with Clarges.

Then I remembered she was a Mexican girl, and I says to myself that there sure is something in the way of trouble in the air. There couldn't be any mistake about that! Something crooked was starting. Because, no matter what might be said about Clarges amusing her, she wouldn't let a big cartoon like him take her home! It wasn't possible.

Well, I was thinking things out like that while I hung onto the sleeve of Soapy and guided him gradual out of the dance hall. I told myself that if I could ever just get him safe back to the lumber camp without a fight, I would be thankful. No, how much he fought didn't make no difference to me, so

long as he would just fight with the right man.

I got Soapy out of the hall and into the open. There was plenty of lights flashing, particularly the ones that come winking through the swinging doors of the saloons, where gents was filing in and out. And up in the hall, the orchestra was getting on its last legs and tearing off the roof with its closing pieces of the evening.

Soapy was sort of falling off and filling again, like a sail. Partly he wanted to get right on the trail of Clarges, and partly he wanted to get into one of the nearest saloons and pour down a gallon of fire water.

I knew what that would do. He would start in brooding over his wrongs and smash up half of the town. And how could I find a way for him to vent his feelings?

I thought of one, pretty soon. We walked by a sour-faced gent with a pair of shoulders almost as broad as Clarges', and a nose squashed about flat with his cheek bones, and his eyes protected by a great, high ring of bone. He was a prize fighter, or had been one, and it was easy to see that there was still fight in him. He had a wicked light in his eye, for one thing, and he wasn't all bulged out of shape with fat the way that most of them get when they're out of the ring. I should have said that he weighed within ten or fifteen pounds of big Soapy Almayer, and all at once it come over me that the best thing in the world by way of preventing a tragedy was to get Soapy well beat up by that same ex-pug.

So I got away from Almayer and went back to the other gent.

"You're the Denver Kid, ain't you?" says I.

"Me? Lord no!" says he. "I ain't that canvas-kissing sucker. Who says that I was? I'm "Cyclone Charley."

And his eyes glinted at me. It was fine. He rose right up to my game like a trout flicking up to sock a fly on the surface of the water, not guessing that you got a hook in the fly.

It was a pretty sight, I can tell you.

"Any way," says I, "I dropped back here to tell you that the big gent up there has got it in for you, Charley."

"Wait a minute while I catch my breath," says Charley with a sneer. "You pretty near scare me. What big gent? You don't mean that sap up yonder, do you?"

"Look here, Charley, I'm only warning you," says I. "The big guy says that you're a yellow hound, and that he dropped a lot of money betting on you, and that you quit, and that he's got a mind to run you out of town."

I thought that Cyclone Charley was gunna pass out. He wabbled a little, and then he lit out after Soapy, saying: "I'm gunna murder that poor stiff!"

I couldn't keep up with him. I didn't want to keep up with him. I just loafed along in the rear and laughed to myself.

I'd played a sneaking part, sure enough, but just the same, though it was a shame to get Soapy beat up by a professional prize fighter, it would save him from doing worse harm before the night was over. Yes, I couldn't really blame myself.

I saw the prize fighter come up with Soapy, saw him tap Soapy's shoulder, and the next minute something was said betwen them, and I saw the big right arm of Almayer smash out like the lunge of a log in a jam.

Why, it was a pretty thing, I tell you, to see the pug duck that punch, and, coming up in close, he hit Soapy four times, with all his might, right in the stomach. It sounded sort of like the thudding of a drumstick on a great, big muffled drum.

I held my breath and waited for Soapy to go down, but he didn't go down. I seen his face by the light of a lamp that sent a streak out through a

near-by window, and Almayer was just laughing, and stepping in for more!

As he stepped, he punched, and the pug danced away before him, bobbing in and out among the driving fists, until he saw his chance, planted himself, and let Soapy have a straight right drive full on the button.

Have you heard a cleaver go through a bone and chug down into the chopping block? That was the way it sounded. But Soapy didn't go down. Instead he leaned in and reached the pug with an uppercut. It was just a half-arm punch. It lost part of its force by glancing off the chest of the prize fighter, but what was left of it hit Cyclone Charley on the chin, lifted him off his feet, and put him on the back of his head on the street.

He lay there without a quiver, completely done, and I came up and peered at him.

Soapy was saying: "You're a fine fighter, old-timer. Dog-gone me if you ain't a bang-up, real good one. Just stand up, and we'll have another round for the fun of it."

Cyclone Charley sat up on his elbows. His eyes were pretty sick looking.

"What happened?" says he, in a mumble. "Who hit me from behind?"

I dragged Soapy away. I was a good deal amazed. Mind you, I had heard a great deal about him and what he could do, but I never dreamed that any common man could stand up to a prize fighter. Well, neither could one. But Soapy simply wasn't common at all. He was about as uncommon as they come. He was plumb different. I couldn't understand how he had been able to weather those whacking punches to the stomach. But he *had* weathered them, and no mistake. He didn't seem to feel no after-effect.

And it hadn't disabled him, that fight, but only it had cheered him up a great deal. He was smiling, now and whistling as he went down the street with me.

"I feel pretty good, kid," says he to me. "I don't mean," he says apologetically, "about the fight, because it wasn't a real fight. But it was fun, y'understand? Because he wasn't too small to fight, was he?"

"No," says I, "he wasn't."

"And he was fast, and a good, hard hitter," says Soapy, arguing with himself. "You got no idea how real hard he could hit. He almost staggered me when he hit me on the jaw. And I think that he may of made a couple of marks on my stomach where he punched me. If only he could of taken it, we might of had a real, fine, upstanding fight, kid, and there ain't anything that does the heart much more good than that, is there?"

I said that perhaps there wasn't. And, while he was in that fine humor, I steered him past the last of the saloons and got him into the first buckboard that was starting back for the camp.

I felt that I had done a real, good job. I was pretty pleased with myself. And, when the morning came, I figgered that both Soapy and Jimmy Clarges would have forgot all about Rosita Alvarado.

That shows what a fool I was!

CHAPTER X.

JIMMY'S HANDS.

WHEN I told the big boss about what had happened, he didn't seem excited none. You take most men, when they get along into middle age and when they've got their hands filled with power and with money and all that, they're so contented with their work and their own world that they don't care about the outside. And what's it to them if there's a man or two killed?

"There's maybe gunna be a dozen or

so dead men around these diggings," I said to him.

"Let 'em drop, kid," says he. "Let 'em drop. I'm getting kind of tired of the dull life around here. In the old days, I used to be working with *men!*"

That irritated me a mite.

"You get off that old riot gun of yours, then," says I. "Because you're going to need it!"

He looked at me a little more serious. That riot gun was an old-fashioned shotgun with two barrels, each like a separate cannon, and each barrel of it could hold a whole handful of loose shot. I had seen it, and I had heard a good deal about it and the way that the old man, several times, had downed a mob by turning loose on them with that terrible gun. His shoulder was layered with two inches of fat. That was the reason why he was the only man in the world that dared to fire the shotgun. It was sawed-off shot, so that the kick wasn't quite so great, now, and it was sure to dose about a hundred square yards of air with enough ammunition to blow a company of men to Kingdom Come.

"You think that there'll be a riot?" says he, pretty thoughtful.

"I dunno," says I. "If there is, I know that you'll enjoy it!"

Of course, I didn't think that there was going to be any riot. To tell the truth, I was just leading up to something else. I was gunna tell about how the two big men was about to smash into each other, and then I was going to tell about the way that I had pried them apart from one another. I was just going to fix things up so that I would be admired a little. And maybe you understand what I mean—which is that after that job that I had worked on the evening before, I *needed* admiration. Maybe you've sometimes felt that way yourself. Admiring yourself ain't the same satisfaction at all.

However, I got away on the wrong foot with the chief, and so I went off in a huff and left him staring after me. And a little later in the morning, when I had a glimpse of him, dog-gone me if he wasn't working away and cleaning and oiling up the old riot gun and making her ready for action.

It sort of scared me. The gent that begins to holler "Wolf! Wolf!" out in a lumber camp is pretty apt to get all the wolf that he wants, and then some. Jostling lumberjacks is a lot more dangerous than jostling tins of "soup."

Well, I had a man-sized job lined up for me that morning, and, as I started away on it, I thought to myself that it would be a good thing if I should take one of the pair along with me. Because that would keep them from any danger of mischief while I was away.

I got to Jimmy Clarges, therefore, and asked him to come along. "All right," says he, "as soon as Soapy is ready. He's down taking a plunge just now."

It gave me the shudders. A plunge, with the surface of the river along the banks all skimmed over with a glaze of thin ice! But that Almayer, he wouldn't hardly care for such a thing as that. He was like a buffalo. He would just smash through and take a frolic in the freezing water, and then come striding out and—throw in somebody else that was standing and shivering on the bank.

That was his idea of a joke!

Yes, sir, that very minute, there was a wild scream from down on the river, and Jimmy Clarges grinned broad and slow.

"They're having their fun," says he. "And some more of it!"

There was another sharp whoop, and somebody else must have been sent spinning into the water.

"Look here, Clarges," says I, "you better come along with me, because Soapy he ain't ready to go, and I have

to start off right now, and you're the only man in camp that's really got the strength to help me through with this here job."

"Not even Soapy?" says he, pricking up his ears.

"Not even Soapy," says I.

He didn't say a word. He just got up and followed me. Pretty soon, as we swung along through the trees, listening to the powdery fall of the snow from the branches now and then, he ups and says: "A funny thing, kid but——"

"What?"

"You take Soapy, he's pretty big and grand, ain't he?"

"Sure he is," says I.

"Kind of like a bull."

"Sure," says I.

"A bull moose, I mean," says he.

"Exactly."

"But there's some things that he couldn't manage."

"I got no doubt of that," says I.

"For instance, he's strong. Got a grand arm. Got fine hitting strength, y'understand. You ever see Soapy hit out?"

"Not really."

"You won't, either," says he, grinning, "not unless you see a funeral afterward. Because, when Soapy hits the other gent dies! He just dies!"

He made a pause. I thought it over, and I could believe it. I had seen the effect of a half-arm punch from Soapy on a strong man, a hardened, professional fighter. That little tap had flattened the pug as though a cart had driven over him.

"But I tell you what, kid," says Clarges, "maybe there's just one man in the world that could take one of Soapy's punches without being killed by it!"

"Maybe," says I, sort of absent-minded and not exactly following what was being said.

"It would have to be a solid sort of a man," said Jimmy. "Somebody with plenty of underpinning, and built heavy and close to the ground, I should say. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I would," says I.

"But," says he, "d'you know anybody better fitted than me to fill just that part?"

"No, Jimmy, I sure don't. Did you ever take a punch from him?"

He shook his head.

"Why, kid," says he, "we're both alive, ain't we?"

"Well, but men don't have to kill each other when they fight."

He stared at me, as though he couldn't understand why I didn't understand.

"Him and me?" he said. "Soapy and me? Oh, if we ever fought, it would be killing. For both, most likely. Though maybe for only one. I'll tell you what. When we first seen each other, we both knew that, and we've never dared to touch each other, ever since."

That was pretty frank talk. I had never heard Jimmy talk like that before, and gradually I began to wake up and see that he was hitting out in earnest and getting at something important. So I began to really listen and pay attention.

"I see," says I. "When I come to think of it, I suppose that if the two of you ever got smashing and crashing away at each other, there'd be two dead men."

"Maybe, maybe!" says he.

He begun to whistle to himself as he went along. It was just a thoughtful whistle from Jimmy Clarges, but from that pair of lungs, and out of those lips of iron that whistling was like the screeching of a factory siren.

It was the right sort of a setting for the hearing of important talk, and I was getting it.

Jimmy says to me pretty soon: "I'll tell you what, kid——"

"Well?"

"Speaking about how strong Soapy is, there's some ways where he's weak."

"It don't seem likely at all," I couldn't help replying to that idea.

"No, not to you, it don't seem likely at all, I got no doubt," says he.

"But it is?"

"It is!"

"What way?"

"Here!"

He held out his hands. His feet was no bigger than the feet of Soapy Almayer. But his hands, they was tremendous things.

"This here is where he's weak," said he.

"I've seen him do a lot of queer things with his hands," says I. "I seen him break between his hands a board that I couldn't break over my knee!"

And, mind you, though I ain't a giant, I'm not exactly any man's weakling.

Jimmy just grinned at me and shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," says he, "he might be able to do that, too!"

But he didn't seem to be budged from his conviction.

"I'll tell you the difference from his hands and mine," says he. "He ain't got the size. And that means that he can't get the leverage. He just can't get it. He can bruise things. He can tear things. But I'll tell you, kid, that he can't slow and sure smash a thing, and turn it to pulp, and squash it gradual, and make the juice just sort of begin to leak and then to run and then to spurt out of it——"

He was closing one of those big hands of his as he spoke, and I could see a man in that grip, I thought, fighting, getting weaker, sagging, and then his heart's blood spurting out. It wasn't a pleasant daydream, you take it from me!

"And suppose," says Jimmy Clarges, "that I was able to take one wallop from the big boy—and live through it—and get in close—and fasten a grip on him."

He stopped. He stopped talking. He stopped walking. He stood and stared at his own idea.

"Just suppose!" says Jimmy. "Just suppose!"

And he licked his dry lips.

CHAPTER XI.

THOMAS' SCHEME.

WELL, by this time I was scared, plenty. I knew something about the ways of fighting men, and I said to myself that if this wasn't a clear case of murder coming up, I would gladly eat the hats of the whole assembled crowd. I give Jimmy Clarges a hard, straight look in the eye, and he give me a hard, straight look back.

"Now, what's up, Jimmy?" says I.

"What's up? Nothing!" says he.

I asked him to look me in the eye. Well, he done it with the most surprising ease.

"Jimmy Clarges!" says I.

"Well, kid, what's biting you?" says he.

"You're planning to murder Almayer!"

"Murder? My God, no! All that I want to do is to beat him!"

"Beat Almayer!" I shouted at him. "You're crazy!"

"Am I? Am I crazy when I say that?" says he. "Well, you wait and see, kid, and maybe you'll learn something!"

"Maybe I will," says I. "Maybe I will—but why fight it out with Almayer, when you know that a fight with him is apt to mean a killing for one of you?"

"When things happen, they happen, and that's all that there is to it, kid," says Jimmy Clarges.

"You've got to fight Soapy?"

"I got to."

And he added suddenly: "Hand to hand, or knife, or—or axes, maybe!"

And he suddenly whirled his ax and turned its huge, double-sized head into a streak of flashing light. What a wrist he had! No, it wasn't a wrist. It was just a bar of steel.

I thought that I might as well get some of his energy out of him. And I pointed out a big tree, and I told him to start.

He began with a shower of blows that ate into the rim of that tree wonderfully fast. But it was a big fellow, with a great, hard heart, and I guessed that it would take even Jimmy half a day to bring it down, because he never kept his ax sharp and, in spite of all his strength, he didn't know where to place his blows to the best advantage.

I left him smashing away at that tree, and I turned back to camp.

The mail had just come up, and yonder was big Soapy sitting on a log and reading a letter. I remember that his sleeves was turned up to the elbow, and the big muscles rippled and bulged, and yet there didn't seem to be strength enough in him to keep that thin bit of paper from trembling up and down.

I went over to him quick, and, when he seen me coming, he grinned at me, sort of foolish, and put the paper away. But not before I had a chance to see that it had feminine handwriting on it.

Soapy getting a letter from a girl!

"Hello, Soapy," says I, "have you been busting the heart of some girl, you big ham?"

"Shut up, kid, you don't know nothing," says he.

"All right," says I. "I don't know nothing, then. What do *you* know, Soapy?"

"Sit down, kid," says he.

I sat down on the log.

"Have you seen Jimmy around?"

"Jimmy's off somewhere in the woods working. I don't know where. Are you taking a day off, maybe?"

He didn't answer that. He just said: "Well, it's a funny thing about Jimmy. He's kind of deceiving."

"How?" says I.

"You would think that he was too simple to double cross anybody, wouldn't you?" says he.

"Yes, and I think that he is."

"Well, that's what I thought. But I was wrong."

"I'd have to have that proved before I could believe what you say, Almayer."

"You would? I got the proof right here in this letter," says Almayer.

"Hey, Soapy," says I. "Have you let some skirt get you all tangled up? Some rattle-headed, thick-witted, grinning fool——"

"Hold on!" says Soapy. "Is Rosita Alvarado any of all those things?"

Rosita Alvarado! And writing to big Soapy!

"What did she say?" I asked him.

"Say, kid, don't you think that I got no sense of honor?" says he. "You think that I would go around and show her letter all over the world?"

"Maybe not! Maybe not!" says I.

I got up and went away. I was pretty thoughtful. It looked a cinch that Almayer and Clarges was gunna make trouble for one another, and the terrible idea come to me that maybe Rosita Alvarado had let herself get tangled up in this affair. I say it was a terrible idea, because what could she have to do with them, really, and what could they have to do with her? They was folks out of two different worlds. Even death and birth could hardly of separated them further, y'understand?

It didn't seem no ways possible, but all at once I decided that I would get at the truth under this here thing. I told the big boss that I wanted to go down to the town for the sake of clearing up something that had to do with Almayer and with Clarges, and right away he told me to go ahead.

Ahead I went, and down to the town, and as fast as a horse could gallop I got there. I got a change of horses at the hotel and burned up the road to the Alvarado house.

She wasn't home!

No, sir, that beat all the luck in the world—for me to make as long a ride as that, and not to reach her in time at her house! Just plain, mean, ornery bad luck that was to have consequences later on, as you'll learn.

Rosita was over to the house of a neighbor.

I jumped for the saddle, and hitched the horse around and smashed away for the neighbor's house, and got there, and pretty soon I was saying to a Mexican servant all kind of reasons why I had to see Miss Alvarado.

Then a tall, dignified old gent come along, and he says what could he do for me, because he was the father of the friend of Miss Alvarado, and that talking with him would be just the same as talking with Miss Alvarado.

I listened to that bunk, and I thought that I would go mad. Just how badly time was needed I didn't know, or how close Jimmy and Soapy was drawing together up there in the camp, but what I did guess was that every minute I really wasted might be fatal for somebody.

So I turned around when I heard the voice of a couple of girls in the patio beyond the room where I was standing. They didn't sound like the voices of servants, even though they was talking Spanish. They was light and gay and bubbling voices, and there was an easy sort of a something about them that made me feel that maybe this was what I wanted.

I says to the old gent that was chaperoning Miss Alvarado so careful that I thanked him very much, but that I thought that I could manage to help myself. Then I side-stepped through the doorway and glided right on out into the patio before the Mexican knew what I was about to do.

Well, he didn't have a fair chance to get heated up, because right there before me I seen two girls walking arm in arm and chattering and nodding and laughing and bubbling like a pair of birds on the bough of a bush. It was a pretty sight to see, if you had any time to linger over it; but me, I didn't have any time. No, sir, I didn't have any time at all, and I turned around, and I says to Miss Alvarado—sure, she was one of them—I says to her: "Ma'am, I got to take five minutes of your time."

Well, sir, that girl just passes a frosty eye over me and says to her friend: "This is very strange!" and turns her back on me and starts to walk off.

She didn't walk far, though. Because with one jump, I was in front of her.

They started back from me with a cry, the pair of them.

"Heavens, Rosita!" says the girl of the house. "What are we to do! Carlos! Miguel!"

"Lady," says I to her, "I'm sorry that I ain't got the time to be polite, but if you start calling in a lot of your house mozos, this here place is all gunna get heated up and splashed with blood, I'm sorry to tell you. Y'understand? I got a reason for being here, or I wouldn't be bothering you at all, ladies!"

They drew close together and eyed me, but they didn't yap no more. A pair of sure-enough beauties they was, with eyes worth seeing, and their mouths more redder than you would believe of anything but paint.

I looked 'em over, and then I says:

"Señorita Alvarado, I'm sorry to bother you, but I sure would take it kind if you was to give me a couple of minutes along with you!"

Her friend gasped and grabbed her

arm, but Rosita Alvarado had plenty of nerve. I got to say that for her in the beginning and right away quick. She was as cool as you please.

She says: "Go over to the side of the garden, my dear. And I'll talk to this man."

Her friend hesitated a minute, and then she left and went over out of earshot.

"Now, what is it?" says Rosita Alvarado. "And you do not know, I suppose, that it is dangerous to break into a house in this fashion?"

"Listen," says I. "I understand what your meaning is. You mean to give me a fair warning. But it don't bother me none. I've come down here to tell you about your dead men!"

"Dead men!" says she.

"Almayer and Jimmy Clarges!" says I.

Well, it fair knocked her dizzy. She put a hand to her breast and closed her eyes.

"Not dead!" she gasped at me. "God forbid that they should be dead."

"What had they done to you," says I, "that you should want 'em to murder one another? What had they done to you? Answer me that!"

"You see, I was fumbling in the dark, but it seemed that I had hit the truth nearer than I could have hoped. For now she cried out: "Nothing! Nothing! What were they to me? It was only to play the wretched joke for the sake of Jack Thomas!"

CHAPTER XII.

I MEET THOMAS.

THERE it was out of the bag! Jack Thomas—he'd used her to tangle up the pair of men that he hated. The little hound! The murdering little hound! I could hardly believe my ears.

And yet there was an obvious reason for it. He couldn't use his guns on a pair of men who never carried weapons. And he couldn't be expected to stand up to them hand to hand. So what was he to do?

Well, in a way it was a clever thing that he had managed. To make the pair of them fight one another!

"Joke?" says I to the girl. "It's a joke that you might have to answer for. D'you mind telling me what the joke was?"

"Why—it was only a little thing."

She had to stop. She was trembling and almost crying.

"I'll never let Jack Thomas come into this house again!" she cried.

"That won't bring dead men back to life," I told her, very stern.

Perhaps I was scaring her too much, but, after all, it was about time that she learned that the jokes a woman plays on men have to be of a certain kind. And better none at all.

"Dead men!" she sobbed. "Oh, oh, oh! But I tell you how it was. Jack Thomas had told me that the pair of them had bullied him in the camp, and that he wanted to get even with them—if only I would dance with them both and let one of them take me home. And then afterward write a letter to the second one—but how could I dream that——"

"What did you say in that letter?"

"Oh, nothing worth repeating. Except that I was sorry that I had not seen more of him the other night, and that I hoped some other time he would come to see me and——"

"And you asked Jimmy Clarges to come to see you, too?"

"Was that very wrong?"

"Was it wrong? Well," I couldn't help adding, "the fact is that neither of them is dead just yet, but before I get back to the camp one of them may be dead, or perhaps both of them. I don't know. I don't know! But if either of them starts a fight, the other one will finish it, and then you'll be to blame."

"But they're not dead—not either of them?"

"No," I admitted. "They're not."

"I thank Heaven!"

"I'm sorry that I talked so mean to you," says I, by way of apologizing.

"It was a due punishment," says she. "And I don't complain to you. It was just and fair. I have no right to say that it was not. But ah, how sick it makes me at heart to think—and they both seemed so simple and harmless and silly—how could they have bullied any one?"

I left her to think that problem out for herself, and tolerable, comfortable, because I knew that it would be a long time before she did any flirting with another man.

I wasn't in such a hurry to get back to the town. At least I was at the bottom of the affair by now. And it really didn't seem possible that those two big hulks would get to fighting just for the sake of a letter and an invitation to call.

Well, that comes later.

As I was saying, I was drifting down the trail easy, letting the pony take his time, and I remember whistling at a fool blackbird that would fly along and light on the fence posts ahead of me, from time to time; and, when he heard me whistle, he would flap his wings and skim over my head and land again farther up the fence line.

Altogether, I felt sort of relieved, though I couldn't tell why. Now that I had the clew to the whole thing, I'd simply go up to camp and tell the truth to the two big men. It was better for them to start in hating Shorty again than it was to have them hating one another.

You can see that I had a pretty good reason for feeling comfortable about the thing. And I couldn't have dreamed of what was really going to happen between them.

Anyway, there I was sauntering along, and taking it easy, and everything hunky-dory, so far as I was concerned, and turning over in my mind the beauty of Rosita, and then harking away from her to what I felt was the cleaner face and the cleaner heart of Jessica.

That was the girl for me!

And while I was dreaming like that, I heard a clattering of hoofs.

I looked before me and seen that the pointed roofs of the town was just beginning to show above the trees. I looked behind me, and there was a rider sashaying down the road as fast as his broncho could lift him.

In another minute, I seen that it was Shorty Thomas, with the rim of his sombrero flared back from his forehead, so that I could make out his features very clear.

It give me a terrible chill. The first thing that I noticed after that was that the flanks of his horse was all polished with sweat, and I figgered that maybe I could ride away and get to the town before him.

But a fine thing it would be to get to the ears of Jessica—I mean, how I had rode away full speed with Jack Thomas chasing me. It would make her laugh at me. And I couldn't stand for that!

No, my horse could possibly get me away from him, but I couldn't leave the trouble to my horse. I had to keep it for myself. And I didn't like the idea.

I was a fair shot with a rifle or with a revolver. Yes, I was a good deal better than a fair shot. And I don't mind saying that I could stand up to most men well enough with fists. But I never was any hand at making it a point of honor to be able to flash a revolver out of the holster like a streak of lightning.

And I knew that that was what Shorty could do.

I loosened up my revolver in its

housing. And then I done the same by the rifle in the case that ran down under my right leg. And now, with the beats of that horse's hoofs rattling right in my ear, I seen that whatever I was to do, I had better do it right there and now.

I snaked that rifle out of the case, and, whirling my broncho around, I quickly jerked the rifle up to my shoulder.

Shorty Thomas, not twenty yards away, yelled to his horse, as he seen me halt mine, and he called out: "Hold on, Rankin, you low hound. I'm gunna——"

And then the next thing he knew, I was tucking that rifle right under his chin. He hadn't expected anything like that, of course. He was a revolver man. That was his specialty. That was the specialty of all of those killers, you see? But this Thomas didn't lose his nerve because I had the drop on him, and his face, it was all wrinkled up with rage, something queer to see, and his eyes snapped and flashed at me. And he says: "You know why I'm here?"

"I can guess why you're here," says I.

"Because you've stabbed me in the back!" he sings out.

"Because I've queered your game with a decent girl whose money you wanted. Is that it?" I suggested to him.

He snarled at me and got purple in the face.

"Blast your heart," says he, "put down that rifle, and we'll start on an even break."

"With Colts?"

"With anything that you want," says he. "I don't care what you use; but are you sure you have got the guts to make a fair and square stand-up fight of it?"

"No," says I, "I ain't. The fact is that I ain't a killer. I haven't spent six hours a day practicing with guns, the way that you have."

"You lie!" says Shorty. "I never done that more'n half a dozen times in my life."

I almost laughed in his face.

"But if you're just plain hankering after my life," says I, "I'll let you get out your own rifle, and I'll let you bring it up to the ready; and, when you've got your gun at the ready, I'll bring mine back to that same position. And then you can try to drop me whenever you want, Shorty, because I'll be more than ready for you!"

He stared at me very fixed and mean for a moment.

"I think that you mean that!" says he.

"You can place all your bets that I do," says I, and I looked him back in the eyes. Because, though I wasn't any blood hunter, still I was keen to hold up my end of this business, and besides, I was getting a little hot under the collar myself.

Well, he looked at me for another minute, and then he says to me: "Rankin, it'd be no more'n a mutual murder."

"I don't mind dying," says I, "but I always have hated the idea of dying alone. You feel the same way, maybe?"

He showed me his teeth.

He was like a bull terrier. Crazy to fight, but really with enough sense not to want to die. He twitched and fidgeted in the saddle, and half a dozen times I thought that he was going to take me up on my offer. But he didn't.

After a while, he said: "This ain't the only time that we're apt to meet, kid!"

"I think it is," said I. "The gents in this part of the world know me, but they don't know you. They know that I'm not a bloodsucker, and they're beginning to guess that you're a scalp collector. And the fact is, partner, that

when I leave here I'm gunna go straight to the sheriff's office and tell him that you're threatening my life. I think that maybe he'll ride you out of the county, after that."

"You yaller hound," says he. "You coward!"

"Drop all your guns and climb down to the ground, and I'll talk to you about that, too," says I.

Well, he sized me up, and working in a lumber camp most of my life hadn't made me exactly like an invalid. So the idea didn't look good to him.

"You better vamoose," says I to him. "We don't want your kind around here. You've missed your act with the girl and her money. And it'll be better all around for you to be carried down the drains before long. The world don't need you."

His nostrils flared and his eyes shot fire at me. And then he turned his horse around and rode off with no more talking.

Me, it left me pretty weak, and, when I got to town, I *did* go to the sheriff. Maybe that wasn't manly. But it looked safer. And I never hankered to be considered a hero. No, not particularly.

Reporting to the sheriff took some more time, and it had got terrible late before I headed me for the camp again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT IS ON.

I GOT to tell you now what happened while I was away from the camp, settling things with Shorty and Rosita Alvarado. You'll admit before I'm through that it was sort of queer that I couldn't have done things in time. It looked like hard luck all around. Fate, I would say.

Well, back from his job of woodcutting comes Jimmy Clarges with his pair of double axes on his shoulder, singing a song very gay as he walks along. And there's a considerable snow blowing across the tops of the trees and settling pretty thick in the clearing around the camp, so that there was no chance of having lunch in the open air. The boys had gathered in the cook shack, where two long tables was laid out for them, and they come in stamping the snow off their shoes, and breathing steam out of their nostrils, and raring for chuck.

Things was going along fine in the bunk house, when in comes big Soapy and sits him down at an end of the table—and "When do we stop getting beans every day in the week?" says he.

I have got to stop here to say that they was good beans, though sort of frequent. They was done Mexican style by the cook, and some said that they was more Mexican than style to them. But I don't mind hot stuff.

However, nobody had ever heard Soapy—or Jimmy Clarges—growl about food in the camp before. Quantity, and not quality, was always what they was after.

The cook, he stands sort of petrified for a time, and then he sings out: "Him that don't like my cooking, let him step up and try to do better. Do I hear any answers? I don't! So shut up and feed your faces, and don't bother the only real working man in this here layout!"

You would figger that that was talking up large and handsome to a gent like Soapy. And Soapy he raised up on his hind legs and give the cook a mean look. But the cook was about fifty, and not much bigger than a minute, and so Soapy he sagged back into his chair, too mad to eat and too mad to talk; and his eye roamed around the table like the eye of a mad bull.

And so his glance come to every man, and every man was looking down at his plate, very discreet. Because everybody knows that when a gent is mad, everything that everybody else

does makes him just that much madder. Nobody stirred and nobody spoke, except one man, and he says: "I never ate after no better cook than ours! Take it easy, Soapy."

Soapy jerked up his head as though he couldn't believe his ears. And right down opposite him, at the far end of the table, he seen the head of Jimmy Clarges raised, and Jimmy looking straight back at him.

"Them that ain't had no experience in decent food and cooking," says Soapy, "hadn't ought to criticize the complaints of them that have!"

It wasn't much to say. Take it among rough gents like we all was in that camp, you might feel that it was hardly anything to say. But then, on the other hand, you got to consider who it was said to. Jimmy Clarges wasn't no ordinary man.

And now there was two general flashes of faces. One as all heads turned to Soapy, to wonder what had gotten into him, and the other, as all heads turned back to Jimmy Clarges, to wonder how he would take a paste in the face like this.

There wasn't long to doubt. Clarges he shoved away his plate, and he bellowed: "I ain't had no experience? I was raised by a good Christian family, which is more'n you can brag about, Soapy Almayer!"

"There is some that has to brag to keep from bein' unnoticed," says Soapy very cutting. And he leans back in his chair and smiles a little at the ceiling.

At that, Soapy could be plumb irritating when he wanted to.

"From bein' noticed by who?" says Jimmy, sweating with meanness and bad temper.

"Whoever you please," says Almayer.

"Not by girls, I hope you don't mean?" says Clarges.

"Hey, what's that?" bellowed Soapy.

"What I said! Some gets a minute of attention, but the longest stayer is the winner. The early bird catches the worm. You ain't the worm, by any chance, Soapy?"

It made Soapy turn purple. He knew that Clarges was bragging about having taken Rosita away from him the other night and taken her home after the dance was all over. And Soapy didn't like to think about that side of the affair.

"I have known gents," says he, "that never could get no attention at all, except from the folks that pitied them."

"Pitied who?" yells Jimmy, getting hotter and hotter.

"If you ain't got no imagination," says Soapy, "why, kid, don't blame me for your lack of it! I ain't responsible for your brains. Go home and complain to your mamma and your papa!"

It was getting sort of rough. Yes, even for a lumber camp. Particularly considering who Clarges and Soapy was!

Lunch was dying out. I mean, there was no particular attention being paid to the loading and the unloading of plates. The folks, they just sat around and stared at one another, and wondered when the lightning would strike.

Somehow the lunch it come to an end, and after lunch, on these here cold days, the boys used to loaf around the fire and sort of steam out and take things easy, y'understand?

They did that to-day. Partly because they was in the habit, but more because they was bent on seeing what happened in this here quarrel.

It was like a prize fight, but a terrible lot more exciting. Charley Fisher told me afterward that his heart begun racing and tearing, and his eyes swam. He near fainted before anything really happened—it was the terrible strain of waiting for the first jump of trouble!

"Where's the poker, somebody?" squeaked the cook.

"Here!" says Soapy Almayer, and he takes up the poker.

It was a big, heavy iron bar, and the boys used to say that the little cook kept it more as a club than as a mere poker. Almayer took that poker, and he bent it double between his hands.

"There you are!" says he.

And he passed it to the cook.

"Hey, what's the main idea?" chirped the cook. "How can I really use a——"

"Wait a minute," says Clarges, and he takes that poker, and just as easy as pie he unbends the folded iron again.

They say that you could hear the iron break in the terrible hands of Jimmy Clarges, and I believe it. Because I got that same poker hanging above my sitting room fireplace right now, and there's the effect of the two bends in it, and the wrinkles of the fracture marks. It's hard to believe. I've seen two strong men try to do what both Clarges and Soapy managed, and the two strong men couldn't do a thing with that iron.

Then along comes the big boss. He had wind of everything in camp pretty quick, and somebody had told him that there was danger of something happening in the cook house. So he come over, remembering my warning, and carrying his old riot gun tucked under his arm. And he come in muttering to somebody: "Where's Jim? Where's Jim Rankin? He's never around when I need him!"

He used to leave most of these snarls among the men to me, to untangle them, and I used to have pretty good luck.

Well, I wish that I had been there then, but I wasn't! The things had to happen that I could have stopped with two words, by showing that pair of great idiots that the girl and Shorty had simply been making fools of them.

I had no luck, and the big boss, he didn't know what to do. He looked at his watch. There was still ten minutes to go to one o'clock, and he couldn't cut the lunch hour short by getting the boys out to work early.

He thought of something else, and it was a good dodge.

"I haven't had a game of seven-up for a long time," says he. "Who'll sit in with me for a little game? The whole gang of you, if you want. Soapy, sit here with me, will you? Chuck, start up a game over there. Take Clarges with you——"

He had the boys in two parts, right away, and with something to think about besides the fight that was in the air.

"Hello, cook!" says the boss. "Got no better cards than these? These are no good!"

He pushed back the first greasy pack, and the cook fumbled in his chest for some more.

"Maybe this pack'll do for the other table," says Soapy, slow and careful.

And he picked up the pack of cards and drummed down the edges with his fingers until it was snug and fitted tight together, and then he picked it up and ripped that pack across.

Have you ever seen a man tear a pack of cards across? You try it with only a half of a pack, and you'll see how hard it is!

He took that mangled pack and reached around him and laid it on the table in front of Jimmy Clarges.

"Maybe that pack would be good enough for you and your gang, Clarges," says he.

It was kind of a nasty remark, you'll admit.

"Pay attention to the game, boys!" yips the boss, getting more and more nervous. "Hey, Soapy, it's your deal!"

He passed a fine, new pack to Soapy, but just then we saw Clarges take the torn halves of that pack and put them together neat and snug, and then tear the two halves across, just as easy as Soapy had torn it when it lay single.

No, you would have to see if you

would believe. But I got some of those cards. There was a great scramble for them, afterward. But I got a few in my possession now, and you can see where they was ripped across in quarters.

He turned around, and he says, "Here's four packs in exchange for your two, Soapy!"

And he laid the fragments on the table right before Soapy.

Almayer stared at them for a moment. He couldn't do anything better than this trick. He must have guessed at the full strength of Jimmy for the first time, and it made his face black as he stared. Then he jumped up and threw the cards in the face of Jimmy:

"You got no brains even in your insults, Clarges!" says he.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEETING OF MONSTERS.

OF course, that was a lot more than enough. That room was instantly filled with diving men—some plunging for the door, and some for the walls, and some making the mistake of crawling under the tables. Because, though those tables were huge, heavy affairs, with the tops made of half logs, the inside surface planed down smooth and scrubbed white, they were knocked here and there and turned over as Clarges and Soapy got to each other and began to wrestle around.

Clarges had swung around from the bench he was sitting on and rushed Soapy, head down, and his forearms curled up over his face to protect him from a punch.

It must have been that he had long planned just what he would do if ever he had to fight Soapy Almayer. And it was a good thing for him that he had, because the very first punch that Soapy used was hard enough to have killed a bull. It whipped straight as a dye for its mark, but instead of the face of Jimmy it reached the huge, thick, cushioning muscles of his forearms.

Clarges wasn't hurt, but the terrible weight of that blow stopped him and straightened him. However, before Soapy could hit again, Clarges had fallen in on him and grappled him with his hands.

And after that it was another story!

Just as Clarges had said to me before, that same day, Soapy could really hit harder than any man in the world. But as for wrestling and rough-housing there was nobody like Jimmy Clarges.

The minute he got his grip the gents that was cowering under the tables and against the walls heard a groan of surprise and fear and pain from the throat of Almayer. I suppose it was as though a bear had tackled him by surprise.

They began to thrash around here and there. Once Almayer was wrestled down to his knees, but he come up again, lifting Jimmy with him, and turning both the tables upside down as he staggered back and forth.

There was plenty of noise, the gents shouting and hollering for fear they'd be stamped to death, as though by a pair of great buffalo bulls, and the big boss shouting for the two to stop fighting.

Might as well have called to the thunder and lightning for which they'd been nicknamed.

And then there was a whirl, and a gasp, and Almayer crashed down to the floor with that Clarges clinging to him, and crushing the life out of him with his long gorilla arms.

But still Soapy wasn't done.

The gents heard Clarges say: "Give up! Say you got enough, or—I'll kill you, Soapy!"

"Kill—and be—cursed!" gasped Soapy.

And then his voice ended in a gurgle, because one of those hands of Clarges had fastened on Almayer's throat.

It was only a matter of seconds, then. The muscles in the neck of Almayer was like great pillars of india rubber. But the fingers of Clarges could crush rock, almost! I've seen him take two stones and crumble one against the other with his grip!

I guess that desperation made Soapy a giant for an instant. He gave a heave and a twist like a bucking horse. He couldn't throw Jimmy clear of him, but he did start them both rolling head over heels, and they went through the doorway and crashed down the steps of the cook house and so out onto the ground. And there luck gave Almayer a chance, for the head of Jimmy hit the knuckle of an exposed root that stuck above the surface of the earth, and Clarges was stunned for a few seconds.

It was long enough for Almayer to get away and stand up, and his knees was buckling under him, and his face was purple, and his mouth was wide open, with the tongue hanging out. Another second, and he would have been a finished man in that grip of Clarges.

Almayer, he went staggering around fumbling at the air, still full of fight, but blind and almost done for. And in the meantime, Clarges was getting back his senses, and swearing terrible, he began to get back onto his feet. His face was like the face of a bulldog, they told me, as he started for Almayer again.

I got to give the big boss the credit that, when he seen them ready to murder each other, he was the only man there that had the grit to rush in between them. And he was hollering to the rest of the boys to help him stop the fight while he dived at Clarges.

Clarges simply swung out with the back of his left hand, and the sweep of it knocked the big boss clean away from him and rolled him head over heels in the moss and mud and sawdust.

The next minute, with a roar, Clarges was at Soapy.

If he had got Soapy in the first rush, that would have been the end, but there was just enough sense in Almayer to get him away from that lunge, and in the meantime, every second was clearing his head terribly fast. After all, he hadn't been stunned, and a man will have a clear head from choking as soon as his lungs get properly filled with air.

When Jimmy Clarges, snarling and foaming, whirled around and rushed again, Almayer was enough himself to do a beautiful side-step, and cuff Jimmy in the face with his fist.

It wasn't more than enough to knock out an ordinary man, and therefore it didn't have no effect at all upon Clarges. He rushed on in for more—and he got it!

You see, fighting in that little, narrow cook house, Jimmy had had all the natural advantages which he could get out of his gorilla strength. But now they was in the open, with snow to make the ground slippery, and the long legs and the faster action of Soapy gave him almost as much of an edge as though he had wings to carry him around.

He simply floated away from Jimmy, and, when Clarges reached for him, a fist like an iron-shod battering ram hit Jimmy between the eyes and knocked him back against the trunk of a tree.

That one punch just drenched his face with blood. Every one of Almayer's knuckles, like a knob of steel, had bit through skin and flesh to the bone.

On came Clarges, covered up like a prize fighter, and trying his best to close in on Soapy, and around and around that clearing they had it out, the most awful fight that any two men ever had in this here world, by the accounts of it.

Twice Clarges got Almayer for a

finger hold, and twice Soapy twisted away like a flash—because he'd come to dread that grip worse than fire.

But in the meantime, with Jimmy all doubled over, and his long, thick arms wrapped around his head, Almayer couldn't get in a finishing punch, though he was hitting hard enough to kill a man with every stroke.

And then it was that I come onto the scene—just too late.

I heard the shouting in the distance, and I whipped that tired pony I was riding and raised a gallop out of it, but as I come through the trees I seen them at it, and I knew that I'd just missed my time.

I threw myself out of the saddle with a screech and started toward them. That instant Clarges got in close again and laid a wrestler's hold on Soapy. But reaching out that way he left his head unguarded, and Almayer, swaying his whole weight forward and up on his toes, smashed an uppercut that grazed the chest of Clarges and hit him flush on the button.

He walked backward, his huge arms flopping at his sides, and his head swinging on his neck like a pivot.

And Almayer leaped after him to give the finishing punch.

If that punch landed, it would kill Jimmy, and I knew it. I managed to get in between and tackled Almayer around the knees. It stopped him a fraction of a second. He reached down and plucked me away by the nape of the neck, like a grown man picking up a baby. But, while I dangled in the air, I managed to yell at him: "It's all right! I got the truth! She's been making a fool out of you and him, too."

He let me drop, but he didn't go on after Jimmy.

He didn't need to, for Jimmy had stumbled over a little ridge of snow and fallen flat.

He didn't try to pick himself up. Matter of fact, he'd been knocked clean senseless by that punch and only by luck had managed to stay balanced on his feet.

I had Almayer by the hand in a minute, and I tugged him away, talking a blue streak to him, all of the time. And the big boss, he understood what he was to do, too. He didn't need no telling. I'll say that for him. He come with a rush, and him and some of the rest of the boys was working away over Jimmy to bring him back to life.

I had Soapy against a tree.

"It was Shorty. It was that skunk Shorty that planned the whole thing!" says I.

Soapy, he raised a hand to his throat. The skin and the flesh was all tore where the fingers of Clarges had gripped him, and the blood was running down onto his breast.

"Shorty?" he said. "Shorty?"

And his eyes was glazed like a man full of dope.

"Shorty!" I says to him. "The gent that wanted to fight you up here. The gent that was with Rosita Alvarado that night. He hated the pair of you and wanted to get even. So he went to the girl. He got her to be sweet to both of you, so's he could get the pair of you into trouble with each other!"

Soapy took hold of me. He sat down on a stone, and he held me in front of him: "Now tell it to me over again!" says he.

He looked as though he would break me open like an orange, if he thought that I wasn't telling him the truth.

So I said the same thing over, and then over again, and I told him how I had rode down and had met the girl, and had talked to her, and had bluffed her into giving me a complete confession of what Shorty had tried to work through her. And gradually, as Soapy's wits cleared after the let-down from the fight, he seemed to understand, and his eye cleared, and suddenly he says: "Then I'll get Shorty!"

"Shorty is tracking it out of this here county. He'll never be seen here again," I told the big chap.

"But then it wasn't the fault of Jimmy!" says Almayer. "It wasn't his fault at all!"

"No," says I, "nor yours!"

"Then I wish to God," says Soapy, "that I'd never knocked him down, because he ain't gunna ever forgive me!"

"You done him no harm after you floored him," says I.

He patted my shoulder.

"No, kid, thanks to you, I didn't. But don't you suppose that he would rather be dead than have been beaten, even by a pal like me? No, no, kid, the harm that's done to-day, there ain't no undoing of it, and I've lost a gent that was more than a brother to me!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE REDWOOD FALLS.

THAT idea seemed to bother Almayer a tremendous lot. And the first thing that he did was to jump up and go to find Jimmy Clarges. I went along, of course, but we found that Clarges was gone.

"He wouldn't even wait to have a bandage put over his face," said the big boss. "He just went stumbling along through the snow and away off among the trees!"

"He'll come back," snapped the cook. "He'll come back when his belly gets empty enough. I know these big men. They're all babies! They're all babies!"

I looked up to the face of Soapy, and it was very dark.

He says to me: "Kid, I ain't any good at this woodcraft stuff. Are you?"

"What do you mean, Soapy?"

"Can you follow a trail?"

"Why, nothing extra. What trail do you mean?"

"I mean the trail of Clarges."

"Ain't you done him enough harm for to-day?"

"Aye," says he, "and I have, and now I want to see if I can't do him some good! Harm? Aye, I've done him enough harm now and enough to last me forever!"

His big hand fumbled at his throat, and he shuddered a little.

"Will you go with me on the trail, kid?"

While he was talking, the snow was falling more fast. The air was streaked and clouded with it, and the ground was growing deep with it.

"I'll do my best for you, old-timer," says I. "But we'd better start pretty pronto, if we want to catch him—with the snow falling like this!"

"We'll start!" says he. "Are you ready now?"

"Aye, I'm ready."

He lunged off ahead of me in the direction that some of the boys pointed out to us. And, as he went, he passed by one of his own huge axes leaning against a tree at the side of the clearing. He snatched that up, automatic, and strode along ahead.

Ordinarily, it would have been hard to follow that trail. I mean, if it had hit out along any of the frequented paths out of the main diggings, but it didn't go that way. It was like the trail of a blind man, full of reels and staggers, and pushing straight ahead, until he seemed to have almost run into a tree or something, and then veering off to the side, but on the whole keeping to one pretty straight line away from the camp.

Big Almayer, he interpreted the things as he went along, and he would say:

"He's blind with the punch that cut his forehead and swelled up his eyes. Those eyes must be pretty near closed, by this time. And besides that, he's more blinded with shame than with pain. He don't care much whether he

lives or dies, except that he's prayin' and hopin' against hope that Heaven will give him a chance to get even with us, some way! Oh, ain't he hopin' that he will have me by the throat once more! And then nothing in the world will ever let me get away from him!"

Well, I suppose that that was a pretty fair picture of what might be going on through the brain of Jimmy Clarges, and it didn't encourage me to go none too cheerful along that trail, I may as well confess. No, I was pretty well scared out, as a matter of fact, and ready to quit at any time, but there was no quit about big Almayer. The idea of being afraid of anything I suppose never come into his head. But me, I would a lot rather of hunted a panther barehanded than to try to hunt a devil like Jimmy Clarges in his present humor.

But I had to go along.

It wasn't so hard to follow the trail, in spite of the fall of snow, because where Jimmy's feet had fallen, they had beat down the whole surface and made a great hole which half a day's snowing could hardly be expected to fill.

So we headed down that trail, with big Almayer following behind me, and breaking out into lively talk, now and then.

"Did he near have you, Soapy?" I asked him.

"Near?" says Soapy. "It was the nearest thing that you ever heard of, kid. The very nearest thing that you ever heard of! I was within about a second of dying. And then by the grace of Heaven his head hit against something. What was it that we hit when we rolled down the steps out of the cook house?"

"It was a root that stuck up out of the ground like a rock."

"Ah, ah, ah!" groaned Soapy. "I've stumbled over that same root a dozen times, and cursed it. And how was I to guess that I would ever owe my life to it?"

And he added: "What's next from here?"

For we'd followed the path of Jimmy's big feet out of the trees, and into a broad trail where there was a jumble of tracks of men and horses and wheels that had churned up the snow here and beaten it down there. Several eight-horse teams had just been along that way, and it was pretty hard to make anything out of the jumble of signs. I was leaning over to study things out as well as I could.

But Soapy didn't hesitate. He struck right out ahead.

"Jimmy would head right on across this trail," he said. "He wouldn't be hankering to meet anybody on a road. Not the way that he's feeling just now. Not him. And the way that he's looking, too! No, he's gone on through the timber."

And, with that, he headed away into the brush, and me picking up to hold after him.

But we didn't find the trail, right away.

I figured that Almayer might be right, but that the snow over here might have been covering up the tracks, because now the trees were heaped with it, and the branches were bent and sagging and groaning with the weight.

We cut in a circle for a sign, and, finding none, we circled again. All at once, I grabbed the arm of Soapy. He stopped.

"What's that behind us?" says I.

"Nothing," says he.

"I tell you I think that I heard something walking along behind us."

"What could be trailing us?"

"It ain't the first time that the hunters have been hunted."

"By a mountain lion, maybe?" says Almayer, grinning, and swinging his ax.

Why, sir, you could see that that big

devil wouldn't have cared at all if a mountain lion *had* jumped him. With a blow of that ax he would have sunk the steel blade clean through a lion. I had to laugh, too, looking at him.

Just then, the wind freshened to a strong gale, for an instant. There was a crashing of snow all around us, and a groaning of trees already loaded with snow and now loaded twice more with the weight of the wind.

A whole avalanche of snow hit the two of us, and left us gasping and blinded and laughing, and cursing. And then, through the mist of flying snow ahead of me I seen a great shadow falling, and a noise of rending and splitting, and a screech of branches whistling through the air, and the ground quivered with the shock.

I hardly sensed what had happened, at first, as I jumped backward. But then I guessed that it was the fall of a tree. And sure enough, there she lay full length—a real giant! The lightning had bit the trunk almost clean through the summer before, and the wind and the weight of the snow had done the rest just at that critical, unlucky moment.

There lay the tree, and where was Almayer?

I stared around, and then I heard a groaning, and I made him out lying stretched on the ground, pinned down by a big branch.

I shouted to him to get a cleat, and I grabbed his leg and pulled him.

Did you ever try to pull a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound man that was lodged in the snow, and caught in branches?

And just then the whole of that great branch sagged some more, and buried Almayer deeper in the snow.

He says, as clear as a bell: "I'm gone, kid. So long! It's gunna flatten me out. You better turn your back and——"

He stopped with a gasp of pain.

He was spread out helpless, and one leg was broke and bent back in under him, most awful to see.

Well, sir, I dunno what came over me—but the idea of that wonderful giant of a man being killed like that—well, it maddened me. I screamed like a hysterical woman.

And there was an answering roar right in my rear! It was Jimmy Clarges, charging out from the brush with the blackening blood still on his face, and his eyes purpled and closed. An almost blind devil, he looked. And I thought that he was just gunna kill me first so's there would be no witness, and then finish off big Soapy.

I was too paralyzed and scared to move an inch. And then he leaped past me and caught at the end of the branch that pinned Almayer down.

"I'll lift this!" he said. "And you pull him out, kid!"

CHAPTER XVI.

DOWN THE TRAIL.

HE heaved up on the branch. There was a shout of joy from Soapy, as he felt the weight taken from him, and he began to twist over and push himself clear with his arms, but, as he did so, some of the smaller branches of the tree which had been keeping the trunk from grinding clear down to the ground gave way, and the body of the tree settled with a shudder and a groan. Almayer was pressed back into the snow and pinned harder than before!

It looked like the finish, you would say. And I stared across at Jimmy Clarges where he was holding up the bough. A weight that must of been tons had been throwed on him by the shifting of the weight of the tree. No, I suppose that I shouldn't say tons. But, anyway, I would bet that no one man ever held such a weight before, and no one will ever hold such a weight again.

He was drove down through the mud and the snow near knee-deep, to where his feet bit into the firm ground beneath. And then he could be sunk no farther. There he stuck, and he gritted his teeth, and his horrible-looking face swelled with the effort, and his lips curled back like a wolf's that's going to bite.

I watched him, like a man in a daze, and I heard him roar in a choked voice: "Get the ax, you fool, and chop off that branch!"

You see how complete my brain had stopped functioning!

I jumped for that ax and with it I ran at that bough. I had weighed and balanced the big axes of Jimmy and Soapy Almayer before that day, and I had wondered how any human being could manage to swing them. Well, sir, I was so excited and desperate, now, that that ax turned into a feather in my hands, and I flushed it almost to the wood with the very first stroke. I tugged it out, and then I began to hew away, and the chips flew out of that bough, just where it narrowed after leaving the trunk.

But, as I worked, though I was swinging that ax like lightning, it seemed to me that hours was passing, instead of seconds. And, though the chips ripped out of the heart of that bough faster than you could count, still it seemed to me that I was working in iron and not in wood—or just gnawing at that branch like a rat.

Because I could see two men dying before my eyes!

What I mean is that Almayer was not crushed right against the earth, and the trunk of the tree was still settling. It was working its way down and down and biting deeper and deeper through the soft upper snow and soft mud, and eventually it would settle a whole foot or so lower than it was here. But in the meantime, it was slipping gradually down, and since Almayer couldn't be pushed any more in front of the branch, it stood to reason that the branch would push *through* him. Y'understand what I mean?

And there he lay with his face turned up and going black.

And yonder at the end of the branch was Jimmy Clarges, doing such work as never was done before. He was keeping the weight of that branch; all that was killing Soapy was the settling of the trunk itself. But Jimmy couldn't stand that strain any longer.

I seen his head thrusting up, and then sinking back and back, and the great cords of his throat, they stood out like so many arms.

"We'll save you, Soapy!" I screamed at him, slamming at the wood.

"You're doing fine, kid," says he, deep and quiet. "Don't you be afraid. I'm comin' out of this all O. K.!"

"This here ax ain't—got—no weight!" I shouted, driving it into the tree with every word.

And then I heard a terrible cry from Jimmy Clarges: "Heaven, gimme strength!"

Seemed to me, when I glanced sidewise at him, that the bough was eating through his shoulder and into his vitals, and I'll never forget the look on the face that he had turned up to the sky, nor the look of his hands as he gripped that branch with 'em, and used their strength to push upward, too. And, as I looked, I seen the shirt split away over the swelling muscles of his upper arm and shoulder, and leave the arm naked.

I seen that with one glance.

Then I heard a faint groan from Almayer, and I knew that nothing but death could have nudged that sound out of him. God put power into my arm, then. I turned and straddled the branch and give the back side of the limb two tremendous whacks. And the next instant there was a ripping and a splitting sound, and the branch busted

off where I'd been cutting, and the whole trunk, relieved of that weight, rolled in a little mite.

But Almayer was saved, unless he had been crushed to death, already.

I looked out and saw Jimmy Clarges throw the branch away like it had been a toothpick, and him and me got to Soapy at the same time, and found him lying with his face swollen something awful, and his eyes fairly starting out of his head, and an awful grimace on his face.

I thought that it was the grin with which he had met death, but Jimmy had his ear already over Almayer's heart, and now he yelled: "It's beating, kid! It's beating! And he's living!"

He lived, right enough.

Says Soapy, one day: "How could I have helped living, when so much had been done for the sake of me?"

He lived. I run all the way back to camp and got the big boss, who was quite a doctor, and he come back with me, and put the splints on Soapy's poor, broken leg. And then a lot of us made a litter and carried Soapy back to the camp. And one end of the litter, the head end, was carried by Jimmy Clarges. And it was a wonderful thing to hear him and Soapy.

"How are you takin' it, Soapy?"

"I'm doing fine, Jimmy. Let somebody else pack that, will you?"

"Not me! Not me! I'm gunna leave nothin' concernin' you to anybody else, I tell you! We'll have you fixed like a king in a lot of down, old boy! Don't you do no doubting!"

We did, too. We fixed up old Soapy fine. And he lay there in state while he was getting well, and lived on the cream of the land.

Somehow, the beating that Jimmy Clarges had got didn't seem to bother him none, after Soapy was brought in. But what we all thought was strange was that he would even talk about the fight. And he always underrated what he done, and how near he came to killing Almayer.

I heard him tell about the whole fight to a kid that was new to the camp: "I managed to get him down with a grip on his throat," says Jimmy, "but he chucked me off him and through the cook-house door, and, when I got up, he finished me with one punch. He ain't a man. He's a devil. Kid, he's the strongest man that ever lived!"

Jimmy had stopped being proud of himself. He had just settled down to worshiping Almayer, and a good thing for Almayer that it was that way; for, though the leg healed, it left him lame, and, when the early spring weather come, we seen the last of Soapy and Jimmy walking away down the trail toward town, Soapy with a cane in one hand, and the other resting on the huge shoulder of Jimmy Clarges.

They was never heard of again, at least in those mountains. Thunder and Lightning turned into a legend. But I suppose that somewhere they settled down together in a quiet town, and by this day I suppose that Soapy is maybe doing some kind of office work. And Jimmy Clarges maybe is keeping the door. But together they have got to be till they die. Fate made them that way. They needed one another.

Lamed by Quartz

By Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "Buckin' a Brace," etc.

THE real kernel of this tale has to do with an ancient mare named Roseta and the race that she ran against her own son, El Cardo, or in English, The Thistle, with the happiness of two persons as stake. But there is much to come before, and the beginning dates from the summer when Carmenita Romero, aged fourteen and the only child of Don Juan José Romero, herded her father's home band of sheep throughout the early part of one summer.

Now it was not at all necessary from a pecuniary standpoint that Carmenita act as shepherdess, for Old Juan was far and away the richest man in the entire valley of the Coyote. Carmenita, of course, knew this and, despite the fact that she was but fourteen, objected to her father's orders.

Old Juan puffed out his cheeks in annoyance. "Name of Heaven!" he grunted. "But thou art of a sudden most particular! Did not thy grandmother, with her own hands, fashion the 'dobe bricks of which our house is constructed. And dost not thy mother work from dawn till dark? Thou farest easy, child. Go thou with the sheep!"

And that ended that. Five generations removed from Spain so far as actual residence was concerned, nevertheless Juan ruled his family with true Castilian sternness.

But, after all, Carmenita found the task neither as lonesome nor as distasteful as her imagination had pictured. Her charges were few. The band was comprised of a dozen or so old ewes with late lambs, together with two score cripples which had been unfit to stand the trip into the mountains the spring previous. The sheep were docile and easily handled. Early in the morning, Carmenita would start them grazing up the wide open valley of the Coyote, keeping to the benches and mesas. Then, at noon, she would turn the band downward to the swift running stream which bisected the valley and, after

watering, would let them graze slowly along the stream's edge toward home.

Afternoon, to Carmenita, was the most enjoyable part of the day. For, every now and then, she would come to some still pool whose depths were as quiet as a mirror and as refractive. Carmenita was fourteen, you will recall, and that means that she was but a scant step removed from womanhood. So it was in no way strange that she should choose to loiter at each pool critically examining the face that gazed back at her.

She had features of Andalusian ovalness and regularity, complexion of delicate peach blown creaminess, a wealth of blue-black hair together with dark brown eyes as limpid and serene as the pool itself.

While gazing dreamily one afternoon she chanced to raise her eyes a bit. Mirrored above her on the placid surface of the water, she saw another image. It was the reflection of a horse and rider, foreshortened by distance to a size scarcely larger than a man's two hands. Carmenita turned languidly as was proper in one almost a woman grown, to survey the newcomers. The horse's coat was red, its rider a freckle-faced youth whose hair flamed like a mountain sunset.

"I did not hear thee come so quiet was thy approach," she told him calmly. "I am Carmenita. Who art thou?"

The man grinned at her stilted laboriously spoken English. "Yes, I know," he answered, "old man Juan Romero's daughter. And I'm Tommy Stanton. My dad's Pat Stanton from across the mountain."

"The gringo who owns the ranch near Pecos, who haf so many cattle?" Carmenita questioned.

Tommy nodded. "Yeah, we own a pretty good string. That's why I'm over here. Our pastures are dry and grass is gettin' short. So we topped a couple of hundred cows with calves and moved them across the range. They're yonder. See!" he said.

Carmenita followed the direction of the rider's pointing finger. Just opposite, a quarter of a mile distant, a small cañon branched from the valley. Partially obscured by a clump of trees, she could see the outlines of a canvas-covered camp wagon and, back of this, a scattered herd of cattle grazing.

"Thou art alone?" she asked.

Tommy bobbed his head and his freckled face shone with pride at the trust imposed in him. "Yeah," he answered, "I'll be batchin' it till grass starts back home. I'm gettin' man's wages too, and besides, dad give me my pick outa the horse herd before I left. I took this filly. How do you like her?" He slid from the saddle and Carmenita, getting to her feet, drew near the pony.

The band of sheep slowly grazing down the valley toward home were forgotten.

"O-o-oh!" she breathed, rubbing the filly's silken nose. "I theenk that she ees most beautiful. An' her name ees what?"

"Well," said Tommy, "I hadn't got as far as naming her. What would you suggest?"

Carmenita paused for a period of thoughtful consideration. "I theenk," she said at last, "I would call her Roseta. For truly a rose ees thee most beautiful flower what grows and thee filly ees, likewise, most beautiful. What say you, Tomas?"

"Suits me," declared Tommy practically. "We'll call her Rose." He gazed calculatingly down the valley in the direction of the grazing sheep and presently broached a proposition that, only a moment before, and popped into his mind.

"Listen, sister," he said, "do you come this way every day?"

"Weeth the sheep, yes," Carmenita replied.

"Then why can't we—it's like this," he said, taking a fresh start. "I'm figurin' on runnin' the filly during the Fiesta at Moya, month after next. And that means that she'll have to go in trainin'. I plan to measure off a level quarter somewhere around here to work her on. There's a whole lot to trainin' quarter-hosses," he continued seriously. "You got to bring 'em on slow, and it's best to take their runnin' time every day which ain't no easy job when you're doin' the ridin'. So I was thinkin' if I could get you to help, that is do the timin', it'd make my job a heap easier."

Just how much of the explanation Carmenita grasped is doubtful. However, she did comprehend that Tommy was asking her to assist in training the filly. Impulsively, giving no thought as to how the stern Don Juan would view such proceedings, she promised her help.

And so the days flew by, lengthening into weeks. Meantime, how the red filly blossomed out! "Twenty-four seconds!" Tommy exclaimed one day, consulting the battered silver watch in Carmenita's hand after breezing the filly a full quarter. "Don't hardly seem possible! Some stepper, what?" Carmenita unreservedly agreed.

Then, a matter of three weeks before Fiesta time, the daily training schedule received a rude upset. The credit, if credit it may be termed, rested with the Señora Maria, Carmenita's mother.

That she should suspect Carmenita had become interested in something else besides her sheep is in no manner strange.

But not being absolutely certain that her suspicions were well-grounded and not wishing to set her husband and daughter by the ears without due cause, she chose to approach the subject in a roundabout manner.

"Would it not be well," she asked Don Juan one night upon retiring, "if thou rode up the valley where Carmenita tends her sheep. Perhaps the grass is getting short, for it seems to me that the band is not looking well of late."

Don Juan puffed out his cheeks. "Wisely spoken, wife," he returned. "Before this I had intended to go but other matters took my attention. Tomorrow I will surely investigate."

As fate willed it, Don Juan's visit coincided exactly with the filly's training hour. He came within sight of the improvised track at the identical moment that Tommy was jumping off his pony.

Now, when they had first started working out the filly, the two conspirators had been hard put to devise a method whereby the timer might catch the exact moment that the pony crossed the starting line. But, after much experimenting, they had rigged, by aid of a spare lariat, a long pole and a white shirt furnished by Tommy, a sort of flag signal that would trip and fall the moment that the line was crossed. And when Old Don Juan came riding up the valley, the falling of the pole, with Tommy's white shirt waving pennant-wise in the breeze, was the first thing to attract his attention. Next he caught sight of a horse as red as a crimson sunset sweeping toward him.

"By all the saints, what have we here!" he exclaimed pulling up. Now you should understand that Old Juan was no novice in the game of horse-racing. For two successive years, he had won the free-for-all at the Moya Fiesta with his black stallion, La Diabalo and also, for the past three weeks, the black had been undergoing intensive training for the third attempt. No, Old Juan was not unversed along this line. It was hard to fool him when it came to horse flesh. Leaning a bit forward in his saddle, he peered intently.

But it was not fated that he should see the conclusion of the trial. The rider, at Juan's first glimpse, was cling-

ing to the bare back as if he were glued, his flaming sorrel head pressed down against the filly's mane to lessen as much as possible the resistance to the wind. Halfway down the stretch, he suddenly straightened up, began sawing strongly on the reins until, at last, he checked his mount. Turning then, he rode slowly back along his course for perhaps a hundred yards, dismounted and, dropping to his hands and knees, began searching carefully.

"Now what?" Old Juan questioned and, clucking to his horse, rode forward. Not until he had passed a clump of trees a few rods farther on did he catch sight of Carmenita. He called to her, "What dost thou here?"

Startled, Carmenita turned. She was a truthful girl, and no thought of deceit entered her mind. "I am timing Tomas' horse, papa," she said simply and exposed to her father's gaze the old-fashioned silver stop watch she held in her hand.

"And this Tomas?" questioned Old Juan. "Who is he?"

"He looks after his father's cattle," Carmenita explained and waved, with a comprehensive gesture, toward the herd of white faces grazing peacefully on the opposite side of the valley.

"Ho!" grunted Juan, puffing out his cheeks. "And what does this Tomas on his hands and knees like some great dog hunting for a buried bone?"

Carmenita gazed up the valley to where Tommy, crawling slowly to and fro, was engaged in minute search. "Truly, I do not know," she answered. "But presently I think that he will come and tell us."

Old Juan snorted skeptically. He felt satisfied in his own mind that he knew the explanation. No doubt the rider had caught sight of him coming up the valley and not caring to face him, had resorted to this hastily-conceived subterfuge.

"Put thou the watch down," he commanded, "and gather up thy sheep. It is not fitting that a daughter of Juan Romero be associating with a gringo."

For the first time in her young life Carmenita rebelled outright at her father's orders.

"Nay!" she exclaimed. "Such would not be right, for the watch is very precious in Tomas' sight. It might be lost and it belonged once to his long-dead grandfather."

Don Juan paused, for he read unalterable determination in his daughter's eyes. No use, he reflected, in making a scene over the matter especially at this time or place. He held the whip hand anyway. It would be an easy task to prevent Carmenita's seeing the lad hereafter. So he said, "Very well. Have thy way but, after thou hast returned his watch, gather up thy sheep and drive them straightway home." Then he turned his horse and rode back down the valley.

Fully five minutes elapsed before Tommy came loping up to where Carmenita waited. He was visibly excited, his face flushed, his blue eyes shone brightly, and each red hair seemed to stand up individually on his head.

"I guess you thought that I was crazy stopping like that," he panted. "But, twice before, I have seen something shining when I rode past. This time I located it exactly, so I went back." He slid from his horse and advanced toward the girl holding out a clenched fist. "Look!" he cried opening up his hand.

Carmenita bent over with an exclamation of pleasure. On the boy's brown palm lay a hexagonal bit of red crystal the size of a walnut. It's faceted sides, highly polished by some queer freak of nature, caught the rays of the afternoon sun, refracting them until the crystal glowed and flashed like a living coal of fire.

"Is it a diamond, do you think?" Tommy inquired breathlessly.

Carmenita shook her head. "Nay, diamonds are white," she said positively. "My mother has one."

"Then what?" Tommy pressed.

The daughter of Old Juan hesitated, while she cast back in her mind in an attempt to recall the name of a precious stone of that certain color.

"Rubies are red," she said at last.

"Then that's what——" he began.

But common sense came to Carmenita's aid. "Nay, Tomas," she contradicted, "rubies are not found hereabouts. But many times haf I found white stones like thees in the valley. *Cuarzo*, my father calls them."

"Quartz," Tommy agreed, translating the word into English. "Then this is red quartz. And red for luck, our luck, you know. For it's an omen, Carmenita. It means that the Rose filly is goin' to win her race. We'll keep on training her."

Carmenita shook her head. "I am afraid, Tomas," she said gently, "that I will be unable to help thee any more." She pointed to her father's retreating figure which, until then, Tommy had not noticed, and told of his instructions. "So I must gather up my sheep and he going now, Tomas," she finished sadly.

Consternation beset Tommy as he remembered a tradition that virtually amounted to an immutable law. In the valley of the Coyote, gringos were looked at askance by the natives of Spanish blood whose coming dated back almost to the time of the Conquistadors. Socially or otherwise, the races seldom mingled. And Old Juan, Carmenita's father, was strict in this respect.

"But I just got to see you again!" the boy cried.

"Perhaps at the race on Fiesta day," she said.

Their eyes met and, for the space of seconds, held.

"How old are you, Carmenita?" Tommy asked huskily.

"Soon will I be fifteen, almost a woman," she said with dignity.

"Well, I'm sixteen myself," Tommy declared. "Mighty near seventeen. Some day, will you marry me?"

Again their glances locked. Carmenita's eyes were the first to fall. "Some day, perhaps, Tomas," she said softly. "When thou art a man."

Tommy's eyes shone. "I wish, Carmenita," he said, "that I had a ring to give you." Then a sudden idea came to his mind. "Here, sister, take this." He pressed the bit of flaming quartz into her hand. "Maybe some time you can have it made into a necklace. I saw one like it in a jeweler's window in Vegas once, only it wasn't half as pretty."

Carmenita's fingers closed around the token and her free hand strayed upward to her hair, where only that morning she had pinned a new, bright red bow, her most cherished possession.

"This I give thee in return, Tomas," she said shyly, "so thou wilt not forget." Then she turned and hurried after the sheep.

Tommy watched her going with a sinking heart. "Now it will be lonesome sure enough," he reflected mournfully as he started back for camp.

But it was fated that he was soon to leave the valley of the Coyote, for the very next day a crew arrived with word that rains had visited the home ranch. Grass once more was plentiful, so the cattle were to be moved back.

The morning following his arrival home, Tommy cornered his father for a talk. "I've got a twenty-four-second pony in that red filly, dad," he said. "She's a steppin' fool if I ever rode one. I been trainin' her up to run in the Fiesta stakes at Moya. What do you say?"

Pat Stanton smiled at his son's enthusiasm. "Sure you can run her, Tommy," he agreed. "Just you keep her in trim, and when the time comes,

we'll go up and give those hombres a race."

But it was fated that Pat Stanton was not to see the red filly run. A few days prior to the Fiesta he was taken sick. He sent for Tommy. "You get ready and go on up to Moya alone," he told his son. "And when you get there, hunt up Old 'Farobank' Cook. Tell him who you are and what you've come for. He knows the ropes and he'll see that you get a fair deal."

So this explains why Tommy was alone when he came riding into Moya two days before the Fiesta.

Old Farobank Cook, as Tommy ambled up the street, sat cocked back under the wooden awning which extended over the sidewalk the length of his hotel, rolling a cigarette. He eyed the oncoming rider, whose hair was as red as the coat of the animal that he bestrode, speculatively as he approached.

"So you're Pat Stanton's boy," he commented after Tommy had introduced himself. "I'm glad to know you. Pat and me were old friends years back. Climb down, son!" And all the while, he was studying the red filly with horsewise eyes. "Good lookin' pony you're ridin'," he remarked tentatively after Tommy had dismounted.

Tommy nodded and proceeded to make known his errand.

"I figured as much soon's I saw you," said Farobank. "What'll the filly do a quarter in?"

"Twenty-four flat. Mebbe a trifle better under the whip. I've never used one on her," Tommy answered.

Farobank emitted a shrill whistle and became as lively as a cricket. "We'll take her right around to the stable," he said, "and make her comfortable for the night. Then to-morrow, if it's agreeable to you, we'll give her a private try-out. Look's to me like here's a chance to make a killin'."

The try-out took place shortly after daylight the following morning, and at the conclusion Farobank waxed exceedingly enthusiastic.

"Why the filly's a streak," he excitedly proclaimed, "jest a red streak. Me, I'm goin' to bet a wad on her for, if she can't kick dust in the eye of that black Romero stallion, then I'm a Chinaman."

The night before the race, while milling restlessly around the hotel office, Old Farobank was seized by a sudden thought. "You done brought any racin' togs with you, Tommy?" he asked.

Rather shame-facedly Tommy admitted that he had overlooked that important item.

"Shoo!" exclaimed Farobank, "who ever heard of ridin' a picture hoss in anything but silks. You got any choice of color?"

"Red," stated Tommy with conviction. "Red for luck!"

"Red it is then," assented Farobank, "and a white cap to top it off." Forthwith he strode out to the nearest store and, returning presently, delivered several yards of red silk into the hands of his wife, whose capabilities with a needle were restricted only by the work in hand.

So, thanks to her efforts, when Tommy came riding forth a half hour prior to the free-for-all the next afternoon he was a picture in crimson. Red horse! Red jacket! Red head! The only modifying tint was the long-peaked white cap. But even this was not without its touch of color for, pinned securely just above the visor, rested a bow of flaming scarlet. Save Tommy himself only one other was aware of its significance. Sitting beside her mother in a wagon close by the finishing line, Carmenita sighed ecstatically as she recognized the bit of ribbon and her hand crept inside her dress where, hanging from her neck in a tiny silk bag, reposed a hexagonal crystal of red quartz the size of a walnut.

Nowhere else can be found the coun-

terpart of Moya on Fiesta day. On this gala occasion, the drabness of the 'dobe-walled houses which line for a full quarter of a mile the town's single street is relieved by yards and yards of bright colored bunting. Marking the extreme end of the street stands Farobank's hotel which to-day also bore its share of bunting. Likewise did the store across the street with its signs in crudely-lettered Spanish. To and fro, round about and up and down the street, swirled and eddied a restless mass of humanity. Slender men, black haired, black eyed, whose finely chiseled features bespoke almost pure Castilian blood, rubbed elbows with others whose squat build, swarthier skins and flat faces betrayed a copious dash of Indian. It needed no great stretch of the imagination for one to think oneself in old Mexico or even in Spain.

Presently the judges, stationed at the finishing line, beckoned the jockeys to draw near. In sonorous Spanish one of them gave final instructions.

"Abreast," he told them, "you will ride to the starting point. There you will turn, take your positions and, at the crack of the pistol, be off. Adios now, amigos. And may the best horse win!"

It had always been done thus, and the crowd loved the slow pacing of the riders the length of the street to the point of starting. Loud and shrill each voice acclaimed its favorite as they passed.

And truly the six racers made the bravest of sights. On the outside, pranced the black Romero stallion, its rider clothed in sable and gold, the colors of old Spain. Next came a bay, its jockey in green and white. Then the Roseta filly, horse and rider the color of the setting sun, and the rest.

There came, at last, from far down the street the crack of a pistol. The crowd, massed about the finishing line, surged forward eager for the first sight of the oncoming riders. Five seconds! Ten seconds! Fifteen seconds and there they were!

"Diabalo! Diabalo! Vamos! Vamos!" The cry became a concerted roar. It was plain where lay the sympathies of the crowd. But there were two dissenting voices at least. From the end of the hotel gallery Old Farobank was pleading in a sort of a bull's bellow:

"Come on you, Tommy! Come on you, Tommy! That's the red head! Flirt dust in their eyes, boy! Flirt dust in their eyes!"

And directly across the street, dancing up and down in the body of the wagon, a certain señorita, blood ties forgotten, likewise shrieked encouragement.

"Roseta! Roseta! Tomas! Tomas!" Nor could her mother still her cries.

Apparently the pulling power of the two lone voices far outweighed the others. For the flame-colored horse and rider came in sight a yard in the lead with plenty of reserve. The red filly was running easily, the sweet, well-timed precision of her stride in marked contrast to the straining, pounding leaps of the Romero black, her only challenger.

Daylight showed between the two and Tommy was grinning back at the gold-and-black-clad rider when the line was crossed. The roar of the crowd had given way to a stunned, astonished silence.

Old Farobank, with a last triumphant yip, pulled his gun and emptied it into the air, then plunged through the crowd in search of the winner. A few seconds later, Tommy, yielding him the filly, vanished in the crowd, presently to appear beside the wagon where Carmenita, her cheeks still flushed, now sat demurely.

"Well, we won, sister," he began joyfully.

Carmenita placed her fingers to her lips with a meaning glance at her

mother who had descended from the wagon and stood a short way off waiting for her husband.

"But I just got to tell you how much——" persisted Tommy stubbornly.

"Then tell me to-night at the *baile*," Carmenita said in a guarded voice.

Tommy remembered that the Fiesta celebration always ended in a grand ball which every one attended.

"If I come, can I have the first dance and the last?" he asked eagerly.

"As many as thou wish, Tomas," she told him. "And now go, lest mother overhear and forbid my attending."

But for all her apparent inattention, the Señora Romero had not missed their conversation.

"I think, Juan," she told her husband when he came to her a little later, "that it would be best if we started home soon instead of staying for the *baile*." She did not state the real reason back of the suggestion, for mother love was strong and she wished to shield her daughter from any outpourings of parental wrath. Rather she resorted to subterfuge. "I am tired of the noise and crowds," she said.

But Old Juan had not been either blind or deaf. From his post close by the finishing line, he had observed his daughter's excitement and overheard her frantic rooting.

"You have spoken wisely, wife," he agreed. "To-morrow is another day and there will be much to do. I think that the time has come to send Carmenita away to school as we had planned. I trust that, under the teachings of the good sisters, she will learn much and unlearn more. And it will be a task to get her ready for the journey."

So after all the Fiesta *baile* proved to be a dull affair to Tommy Stanton's way of thinking. Notwithstanding the fact that he had won the principal race of the day and, in consequence, was more or less of a public hero, he failed to have a good time. Hour after hour, he watched the door or scanned the ballroom hoping for a sight of Carmenita. By midnight he had given up hope of her coming.

"Oh, well," he sighed, "there ain't anything in this for me," and leaving the hall made his way morosely to the hotel.

Apparently Carmenita's failure to attend the Fiesta *baile* marked the beginning of a run of bad luck for Tommy Stanton. For when he returned home he found his father still sick. Winter came and spring and another summer, but his father grew no better. Consequently the task of overseeing the ranch gradually devolved on his young shoulders. He had no time for outside interests, no opportunity to condition the Roseta filly for a second try at the Fiesta stakes even had such been practical. Nevertheless, he managed to steal a day off to witness their running. Standing beside Old Farobank Cook, he watched the black Romero stallion win without much competition.

"Now, ef yo'd only brought up yore filly, son," Farobank remarked mournfully, "we'd have given those hombres another cleanin'."

"Well, I expect that she's run her last race," Tommy told him. "The fact is," he went on after a moment's hesitation, "she's in foal."

"In foal!" Farobank exclaimed, and you could have knocked him over with a feather, "to what hoss?"

"To yonder black," Tommy answered. But he refrained from stating how the spring before, giving way to an irresistible longing to see Carmenita, he had, as an excuse, taken the red filly to the Romero ranch for service. He sighed, as he recalled the hopelessness that filled him upon learning that she was in the East at school, and instinctively his fingers closed around a crushed bow of crimson in an inside pocket.

"Well, yo'd ought to get a 'dinger of a colt," commented Farobank and said no more.

That fall more calamity befell Tommy for his father died and he had to shoulder the entire burden of the ranch. Spring came again and, with it, the war clouds which for two years had enveloped Europe. Tommy found himself hedged in between the fire of patriotism and the wall of duty. His mother helped him in coming to a decision.

"We'll sell all the cattle, son," she said, "and lease the ranch until you return. Meantime, while you are away, I'll go into town and live."

So Tommy disposed of all the livestock, that is with the exception of the red mare Roseta. He rode her up to Moya a few days before he enlisted. Following behind was a spindly-legged, little colt.

"I just couldn't bring myself to the point of selling the old girl," Tommy confessed to Farobank. "I'd rather give her to you, if you'll take her with a proviso attached. Would you accept her?"

"Would I?" exclaimed Farobank joyfully.

"Well, then she's yours," said Tommy, "and here's the proviso. You're to sell the colt as soon as it's weaned and turn the money over to the Red Cross. Will you attend to it?"

"I shore will," Farobank promised, "and afterward I'll write and let you know what he brings."

But war had been over for some time before Tommy learned the results of the sale. Then a letter from Old Farobank, after many devious wanderings, caught up with him in a hospital in France.

"I done sold the colt at auction," Tommy read, deciphering with difficulty Farobank's almost illegible scrawl. "I bid on him myself and run him up to five hundred dollars before I quit. Old Juan Romero bought him. His daughter, Carmenita, is back from school and she seemed possessed to own the colt." There was more of course and then, at the bottom of the letter, Farobank had added this urgent postscript: "When the show yonder is through, I'm expecting you to come and stay with me a spell. We still got a few beans for the pot."

It was midsummer, however, before Tommy landed home and another month elapsed before he clambered out of the stage in front of Farobank's hotel one noon. Farobank delayed barely long enough to shake hands, then took Tommy by the arm and hustled him in the direction of the stable. "You come on with me, son," he said, "I want to give you an eyeful of hoss."

Years and motherhood had marked the Roseta mare but lightly. Slight hollows showed above her eyes and scattered here and there throughout her coat were a few gray hairs. Otherwise she was a picture, her form as symmetrical, her silken hide as glossy, and her muscles as pliant and unbound as when she was a filly.

"What do you think of the old girl, son?" Farobank asked, after allowing Tommy plenty of time for inspection.

"Why, she looks great!" Tommy declared. "You got her in training?"

"Well, I been havin' a young Mexican lad work her out every day for the last month on the chance that you'd get here," Farobank said.

"Get here?" echoed Tommy, turning a perplexed face toward the hotel man.

"Yeah, to ride in the Fiesta stakes next week," Farobank explained.

Now Tommy did look surprised. "You don't mean——" he began.

"Listen, son," Farobank interrupted, "I'll admit that I'm a livin' example of the sayin' 'no fool like an old fool.' But I'm dead set on givin' the old girl one more whack at the Fiesta stakes with you ridin' her. Why, I been pray-

in' for the last six months that you'd get home in time. The old horse's got a heap of run in her yet and is sure achin' to turn it loose. Look at her now!"

Tommy gazed at the mare. A horseman was riding up the street at a rapid gallop, the pound of his pony's hoofs sounding clear and sharp-cut. The mare had heard them. She stood tensely poised with elevated head and ears cocked forward, and in her eyes glowed the ruby light of courage. Everything about her attitude betrayed desire to match paces with this unseen galloper.

"Will you ride her, son?" Farobank asked again.

"Who do you figure that she'll have to beat, Romero's old stallion?" countered Tommy.

Farobank shook his head. "No, the black's dead. The truth of the matter is that there's only one hoss that's liable to stretch her out. And that's her own son, Carmenita Romero's chestnut colt, El Cardo."

Tommy's heart turned a sudden flip. "She—she's running him?" he asked.

"No, but Old Juan is. Borrowed him from her for the race," Farobank answered. "Now what you say. Will you ride the mare?" he asked.

Tommy nodded. "Sure thing, old-timer. I'll try her out to-morrow, and we'll see how good she is," he said.

Perhaps it was mere chance that led Tommy up the valley of the Coyote the next morning in quest of a suitable spot on which to hold his private try-out of the old mare. Who knows? But surely it was not chance that caused him, in the end, to select the identical place where, as a filly, she had received her first training. He dismounted by the same pool where first he had encountered Carmenita and threw himself on the grass that the mare might have a breathing spell before the test. Thirty minutes possibly he sat musing and gazing idly into the water's placid depths. Then, emerging from behind the reflected image of a bush, the picture of a horse and rider no larger than a man's two hands mirrored itself on the pool. For a space of seconds he stared unbelievingly before he turned.

"Carmenita!" he cried.

"Hello, Tommy," she answered, and he hardly recognized her voice. For the stilted little accent, acquired in a family whose intimate conversation was almost wholly in Spanish, had been smoothed away by her years at school. "I knew the mare when she passed the ranch but I wasn't certain about the rider, so I had to come and see," she explained.

She dismounted and sat down beside him, and soon Tommy found himself telling her of Old Farobank's desire to race the mare once more and of his promise to ride her.

"How fast is she these days, Tommy?" Carmenita inquired.

"That's why I'm here—to find out," he explained. "Farobank seems to think that she's about as good as she ever was but he's biased. It's not humanly possible for her to do a quarter under twenty-six seconds at her age."

Carmenita shook her head. "I don't know as you have heard but daddy borrowed my pony, El Cardo, to run in the free-for-all. And he's doing better than twenty-five in training right along. So I'm afraid that the best that you can expect is second place, Tommy," she said.

"Well, I can't see that it makes any difference. Personally, I'd like the colt to win. Roseta's had her day," he said.

They talked on, and inevitably the conversation drifted back to other days. All thoughts of the errand, which had drawn him there, were gone from Tommy's mind. Another subject much nearer his heart was uppermost.

"I love you, Carmenita," he said rather haltingly some time later, "and

always have. You remember what you once promised to do, when I was a man. So will you marry me, dear?"

Carmenita smiled. "A promise is a promise, Tomas mio," she said mischievously. "But first we will have to win father over to our way of thinking."

"That shouldn't be hard," said Tommy.

Carmenita's eyes grew troubled. "Ah, but I fear that it will be," she contradicted gently, "for listen! While I have been away to school and consequently know the absurdity of our racial prejudices, father's vision is still limited. He is as narrow as ever in his thoughts and viewpoint. It will be hard work to persuade him that any good can come of my marrying a gringo. He is just old-fashioned enough to believe that Spanish people are the superior race."

Tommy's face hardened. "Well, if that's the case, let's——" he slowly began.

"Please don't suggest that we be married against his wishes, Tommy," Carmenita pleaded. "It would mean an irreparable break with my family and that would not be pleasant for me. Besides father has been known to change his mind. So let's wait and see if we cannot bring him to our way of thinking."

For several moments Tommy sat buried in silent reflection. He was acutely aware of Carmenita's position. After all, she was a Spaniard, in whom filial obedience is an ingrained trait. It would be utterly selfish for him to insist that she marry without her father's consent.

"Anyway," he said, bringing his reflections to a close, "we may as well go put it up to him. He's got to know sooner or later."

Together they walked back to the Romero ranch leading their horses. They found Don Juan in the corral overseeing the cooling off of Carmenita's pony, which had just come in from it's daily exercise. The black of his sire and the red of his dam had merged in El Cardo. His coat was a deep chestnut in color. And, like most chestnuts, he appeared to be a trifle flighty when warm, for he was prancing his protests to the operation of cooling.

Surprise mingled with recognition on Old Juan's face, as he noted his daughter's companion. But his welcome, while not overly cordial, was nevertheless the essence of Castilian politeness. "I am glad to see you safe home again, Señor Stanton," he said, offering his hand.

They talked for a moment of trivial matters. Meantime, one of the ranch hands, approaching with a blanket, attempted to fling it over the chestnut pony. El Cardo shied toward where the three stood conversing, flirting his tail angrily.

Carmenita gave a little cry as, narrowly missing her face, the end of the pony's tail swept the front of her dress. "Look!" she exclaimed, holding up the end of a broken chain, "my pendant has gone!" She bent over and began searching the dust of the corral eagerly. Tommy joined her. "What does it look like?" he asked.

Old Juan answered. "Pouf," he said, blowing out his cheeks, "eet ees nothing. A trinket she haf owned since childhood. Long haf I promised one much more nice ef she would but cast this aside."

At length Carmenita gave over the search as hopeless, but Tommy saw traces of tears in her eyes. This, as much as anything, nerved him for the task which, since coming face to face with her father, he had begun to dread. Taking a deep breath, he made the plunge.

"Don Juan," he said, "I wish to marry Carmenita. She has consented,

providing you'll permit. How about it?"

Old Juan's jaw sagged with astonishment only for a second. Then his mouth clicked shut and his face grew grim. "Such ees not to be considered, señor," he said in a tone of unalterable determination. "Carmenita ees Spanish while thou art a gringo. Never yet haf one of our family married outside their race. Eet ees not to be thought of."

Tommy's face drained and he started to protest, but bit off the words, when Carmenita shook her head behind her father's back.

So used was Don Juan to having his own way in all matters of family government that he misinterpreted Tommy's silence for surrender. So, abandoning the subject as settled, he proceeded to gratify his curiosity along another line. Ever since Tommy had appeared leading Roseta behind him, he had been appraising the old mare with covert glances. In turn he propounded a question of his own.

"The old mare, weel she run on Fiesta day?" he asked.

Now it's a poor sort of a man who won't stick up for his own horse, and a jockey that won't take up cudgels in his mount's defense is even more contemptible. Moreover, a growing rancor against Old Don Juan was taking possession of Tommy.

"You're right she's goin' to race," he retorted. "And what's more she'll run the legs off the rest of the bunch and don't you forget it."

Juan was impressed. The mare looked to him to be in the pink of perfection and you could never tell about a horse. Besides he held Tommy's opinion in respect, for had he not entered this same mare as an unknown filly several years before and cleaned up on the black Diabalo till then considered invulnerable? Most certainly this young gringo knew horses. But even so, if the mare were as good as ever, he had no cause to worry over the outcome. He had held the watch on the chestnut during all his exercise and knew absolutely what he was capable of doing.

"Good," he said after another long glance at the red mare. "Then will we see a horse race and would the Señor Stanton care to bet on the old one's chances?"

There was one characteristic that Tommy possessed in common with most red heads. He was inclined to be pugnacious, if pressed too far. And now his temper was rising. His gaze had scarcely left Carmenita for an instant. As a combined result of her father's refusal and the loss of her pendant, she was having hard work to wink back the tears.

"The hard-headed old rip," Tommy was reflecting as Old Juan made his statement, "why don't he consider some one's feelings in the matter besides his own?"

Letting go all hold of his temper he snapped back, "I'll bet nothing except I marry Carmenita. I'll wager all I got on that."

Don Juan looked startled. He had considered that matter settled. Evidently, though, his opinion and the gringo's differed. But he thought that he saw a sure way out.

"Eef the señor ees still of that belief," he said suavely, "why not make it a stake? You are a man of your word and I also bear such a reputation. Eef the red mare beat her son, El Cardo, then you wed Carmenita weeth my most gracious permission. But, eef the colt win, you go way and bother her no more. Are you what in English I hear called game?"

Preposterous and unfair! Nothing could have been more so. But, at that particular moment, Tommy was in no fit state to reason. Mounting passion had submerged better judgment and, under sufficient provocation, he would

have bet that a cow could jump over the moon. He saw Old Juan through a veil of red. Ignoring Carmenita's signaled gestures to the contrary, he nodded shortly.

"You're on," he snapped.

Not until some ten minutes later, after Old Juan had bidden him a civil adios and he was walking with Carmenita toward the corral gate, did the utter foolhardiness of his wager dawn on Tommy.

Carmenita was having hard work to keep back her tears.

"Don't you worry, sweetheart," he comforted, striving to force into his voice an assurance that he was far from feeling. "We have not lost by a long shot. I'll get to work on the old mare, and no telling what she'll show."

Carmenita shook her head. "Ah, Tomas," she said sadly, unconsciously reverting to the speech of her childhood, "greatly do I fear that our luck is gone forever, lost in the dust of the corral."

"You talking about that pendant?" asked Tommy, puzzled. "What's that got to do with it?"

Carmenita looked up with a hurt expression in her eyes. "Haf you forgotten, Tomas mio? Dost thou not remember that piece of red cuarzo that you found and gave me one afternoon? 'Red for luck, our luck,' you said then. I have always kept it, worn it close to me all this time. And we haf both been lucky, yes But now, eet ees gone and greatly do I fear."

"Shucks," said Tommy encouragingly, "forget it. We'll pull through somehow."

Once more the Fiesta-day crowds were in evidence, chattering, laughing, calling, a kaleidoscopic mass of color, keyed up to a nervous, anticipatory excitement. Again the riders were approaching the judges at the finishing line for final instruction. But this time there were only four.

A sable and gold rider, the colors of old Spain, astride The Thistle; a purple-clad figure on a Savoya horse; a breech-clouted Indian from Taos, riding a dun, and lastly, the crimson-clad Tommy on the red mare, Roseta.

Presently, the judge having delivered his instructions, they turned and, side by side, paced toward the starting point. It was anything but a joyous ride for Tommy Stanton. The clamor of the crowd sounded like a dirge in his ears; he felt as though he were riding to his own funeral. For, during the past week, he had become thoroughly acquainted with the red mare's shortcomings as well as her capabilities.

"You better keep your money in your pocket this year," he had advised Old Farobank a day or so before, with the intent of heading off any wagering on his friend's part. "Roseta's full of run and her heart's right but age has slowed her down. She can't do a quarter in less than twenty-five to save her life. And that son of hers, why it's common talk that El Cardo's clickin' off twenty-four under wraps."

"Shoo, Tommy," Farobank disclaimed. "I wasn't figurin' on bettin' any money. Like I told you at first, I'm jest enterin' the old girl to sorta humor her. She's as full of go as a rubber ball and she'll enjoy it. No, sir, this is one race where neither one of us will have anything at stake."

Alas for Farobank's ignorance. Little did he think that Tommy had wagered a lifetime's happiness on the outcome, and consequently he never realized the heaviness of the crimson-clad rider's heart, as he paced slowly past him on the way to the starting point.

At last sounded the crack of the pistol. Four flashes of color—the sable and gold of Spain, the Savoya purple, the golden bronze of the breech-clouted Indian with the solid crimson on the outside.

There was no advantage gained in

that all-important jump-off. For the first hundred yards the horses ran nose to nose. Then, little by little, an inch at a time, El Cardo forged ahead. At two hundred yards both the Savoya and the Taos horses were a length to the rear. But the red mare was bravely clinging to the neck of the colt that she had foaled.

With his head pressed down against her mane, Tommy was going through agony. So soon in the race his mount was giving all that she had, which was barely enough to hold her son. And El Cardo, Tommy perceived, had not yet extended himself. His rider was holding him under single wraps for a last heart-breaking spurt at the finish. Tommy was uttering little incoherent, agonized prayers. Oh, for a break in luck! Some sort, any sort! And then, with the finishing line in sight, as if in answer to his entreaties, the break came.

With his head bowed against the red mare's mane, from the corner of his eye he could plainly mark the even stride of the chestnut colt. Now, almost imperceptibly, came a falter in the measured step. El Cardo seemed to go off balance, to shrink at each impact of his right forefoot against the hard road. A dozen more jumps and it became more and more apparent that something was amiss. The chestnut colt was plunging now, visibly favoring his right forefoot. Inevitably it affected his pace. Twenty paces from the finishing line the red mare had drawn to even terms.

The sable and gold rider in desperation drew his whip. Tommy, who was riding barehanded, stretched far out along the red mare's neck. "Now! Now! Now!" he shouted in her ear. He could feel her gather herself in response, feel her muscles bunch and grow taut as she lengthened her stride. Ten paces! Five! One! And, with a last supreme effort, the red mare shot over the line, winner by a whisker.

Gradually Tommy slowed down his race-crazed mount and, after turning her, rode slowly back toward a little knot of persons who had congregated around El Cardo. His heart sang happily. Despite the fact that her son was by far the better horse, The Rose had won—won him the right to future happiness. And to Old Don Juan's credit, let it be recorded that he met the victor with outstretched hand.

"I see that it was thee weel of fate, Tomas, that thou shouldst win. I bear thee no malice. From henceforth thou art my son." Tommy squeezed his hand.

"But what in the world made the colt go lame of a sudden?" he asked.

It was Carmenita, a bubbling, joyous Carmenita who answered. "Look, Tommy! it was this which made him lame," she cried and opened up her hand. "El Cardo picked it up from the dust in the corral where it lay lost. Just now we dug it out from the frog of his hoof," she said.

Awe replaced the happiness on Tommy's face as he gazed at the flaming bit of quartz that he had given Carmenita so many years before.

"Red," he breathed softly, "red for luck."

Silvertip's Cub

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Prisoners of the Glacier," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOWICH HEADS NORTH.

VADER arrived in Seattle highly pleased with himself. Upon reporting to his superiors, he was given a good block of stock in accordance with their agreement. Through friends, he secured an invitation to a dinner dance at one of the exclusive clubs and invited Flora Maynard to accompany him. She accepted.

In his moments of relaxation, Vader could be very attractive. His thin, cruel lips, drawn tightly over yellow teeth, were forgotten in his amazing fund of stories. Flora Maynard found herself greatly interested. He was older, too, than Mart Taggart and knew the game of romance far better than his rival. He said and did the countless little things that women appreciate. Mart was more like a cub bear, awkward, and well-intentioned.

Due to the wait for a southbound steamer, Mart's second letter to Beaver Dupree arrived in time for it to go south on the same vessel with Vader and Flora Maynard. Sensing the importance of the communication, Beaver Dupree had acted instantly. Therefore, it was with considerable amazement that Vader read, several days later, that the Taggarts had chartered the *Sea Ranger* for an Arctic trading expedition. The item was printed on the water-front page of a Seattle paper along with similar news. "Mart Taggart," the item had concluded, "will join the *Sea Ranger* at Nome and make the cruise."

Gone were Vader's plans to loaf for a while and play around with his enemy's fiancée. If Mart's luck changed and no one were there to make the going rough, he might come out in time to save the situation. So Vader hastily made his excuses to Flora and caught the first northbound vessel. He planned to visit Vance Island and look

into the fox situation, but now that was impossible. He did not even call at the island, but contented himself with a native's report that a few silvers remained at large, picking up a living along the beach.

Sazonovich was beyond reach, doing good work in the river country; but Ben Mowich was available, and the curse of the Taggarts might well have reached the Arctic settlements. If not, then it would soon be made known to them. Vader sent for Ben, who came. "Get this," Vader said in his usual impressive way. "You want to get away from Sazonovich. Well, here's your chance. As soon as Mart Taggart reaches Nome, he's going into the Arctic. You are going with him, understand? Never mind about the money; I have plenty of that. You join him at Nome. Take this letter to my friend, Captain Jensen, of the *Sea Ranger*. Give it to him personally, and see that the seal isn't broken. The captain is almost as big as Sazonovich, and just as rough. I shall be waiting for you at Nome when the schooner comes out. If things go well, I'll have Sazonovich leave you alone; but, if the curse of the Taggarts doesn't follow you into the ice, then you'll settle with him in a dark room, and his wound won't open again to save you. When fall comes, I'm expecting Ivan to be in great shape."

Thus it happened that Ben Mowich arrived in due time at Nome and found the *Sea Ranger* ready for sea, while Mart Taggart was expected at any moment.

Ben called at Mart's hotel the day after the latter's arrival. He was all smiles, happier than Mart had ever seen him before. "You hire me for all summer," he explained, "and after doctor keeps me a while, he says that I can go. You hire me now? I go into ice with you. I know Eskimo language and work hard."

"Did you follow me all the way to Nome just to work, Mowich?" Mart asked.

"Sure!"

"Well, such loyalty will have to be rewarded here or hereafter and I guess that you prefer it now. All right, I'll need a man. They tell me that you can grade furs, too?"

"Yes, good grader!" Mowich answered.

That very afternoon, Mart, Ben Mowich and Captain Jensen went through the surf to the *Sea Ranger* lying at anchor in the roadstead. The *Victoria* was just discharging her cargo. When she sailed south, a fair shipment of furs bound for the Seattle Taggart store would be aboard. "And, when she makes her last trip," Mart promised himself, "she'll have enough fur to keep the Taggarts going all winter. After that nothing matters, if the ladies will just continue to believe that we set the styles."

Some receive their Northern education by degrees, a year here, two years there, several years elsewhere. But Mart Taggart was an exception, for he was taking his Alaska in great doses. Though born in the territory, he had not visited the country since he was a small boy. In a few short months that, at times, had seemed very long, he had learned something of the sea coast, covered a vast area of the river country, and was now in the ice.

Captain Jensen shared his cabin with Mart, but it was evident that he had no affection for the Taggarts. This was merely a business matter, before which personal feelings gave way. Jensen had been offered a charter, which he badly needed; the offer had been accepted, and he was now doing his part. Day after day, he drove the schooner northward, following the retreat of the ice until, after a series of hard bucks and a display of ice knowledge that was amazing, he rounded

Point Barrow, then dropped southeasterly toward the fringe of settlements along the northern shore of the continent.

It was at the settlement of Point Barrow that Ben Mowich pleaded for permission to charter an Eskimo umiak and make a side trip to a small village. He seemed to be so certain that he could obtain furs that Mart fitted him out. "Be back in three weeks at the outside," Mart instructed him, "and if we are not here, you remain until we return."

The responsibility seemed to make a new man of the native. His eyes sparkled and something akin to real spirit came to the surface. He knew the dialect, too, for when he spoke he did not have to repeat or elaborate his orders.

Point Barrow proved to be a breathing spell and a surprise. Without warning the surprise came. Captain Jensen was working on a stack of papers, Mart was reading, when the soft lap of water against the schooner's hull was broken by a different sound, the hum of a distant bee. It grew in volume. There were no planes in this land, except at Fairbanks, hundreds of miles to the south. "Plane?" queried Mart, dropping his book.

The answer came with a sharp increase of the hum. "Plane it is, sir!" the skipper cried. They ran to the deck and looked up. A large plane was circling, seeking a landing on an ice-locked lagoon. Again and again, the pilot seemed to hesitate, for a crack-up in this land is serious. Presently he skimmed over the ice; snow flew in clouds; the aircraft lurched violently and came to a stop. Eskimos and whites rushed over the ice.

Mart ran back to the cabin for his parka, caught up the garment and stopped. A gust of wind coming through the open door had blown the skipper's papers about. He stooped and began picking them up. With no intention of prying into others' affairs, Mart paid no attention to the different letters until he caught, by chance, a reference to himself. One phrase stood out, "Old Silvertip's Cub is on the run."

The letter was from Vader and Mart read only the paragraph in which his name appeared:

> Old Silvertip's Cub is on the run, and it is up to me to keep him moving. Rushing to the Arctic took me off my guard, for I stopped one letter to Beaver Dupree asking him to charter a schooner. A second got through, no doubt. I am leaving this to you. If you can manage to get stuck in the ice, there is ten thousand dollars cold cash for you personally. I will also agree to pay any expense you are out because of wintering in. This is a lot of money, but we are playing for big stakes. In addition to all this, you can expect future charters from the Decaturs. I will see to that.

Was there no limit to the length of Vader's arm? Regardless of where Mart might go, or what he might do, Vader was always within reach. Had Mart read further, he would have learned Vader had sent the letter by Ben Mowich, and that he was coming North himself and, perhaps, into the Arctic if conditions justified it. Nome would be his headquarters when he arrived. A step aroused Mart from his thoughts. He hastily placed the papers on the desk, weighted them down, and pulled on his parka as the skipper entered.

"The plane is from Fairbanks. It may have mail. That is the custom of the country, you know, to pack a few letters when going to remote places. Coming along?"

"Sure am," Mart agreed, following the skipper off the schooner.

In Brower's trading post, with his flying clothes off, the pilot broke open a packet of letters. There were several for Brower and then he called, "Captain Jensen. Looks like a girl's hand writing," the pilot added with a

grin. "Here's another girl writing, too. Martin Taggart!"

Mart knew, without looking, that the letter was from Gloria Vance. That little miss was certain to keep posted on everything going on. If she heard of a plane headed for Barrow, she was sure to send a letter. It was a nice, fat letter, too. Mart found a warm, comfortable spot, sprawled his long legs in front of him, and read several closely-written pages. She had been obeying what she was pleased to term, "your instructions," and was buying fox pelts of all kinds, reds, crosses and silvers mostly. One or two small lots of short-haired fur had also come her way. "What a loyal little kid," he whispered affectionately. But the real news came toward the end, after she had explained that she had just heard that a plane was supposed to hop from Fairbanks to Barrow and hoped to get the letter to Fairbanks in time.

If ever there was a despicable crime committed against an ignorant people and an honorable firm, it was Vader's thus far successful plot to ruin you. Any sensible person knew that the epidemic that always followed a Taggart man's appearance could be explained. Doctor Van Ness got the whole story from Ben Mowich. Ben, it seems, is a germ carrier. He does not have the disease himself, but transmits it to others. His contact with white people does not seem to have spread "throat trouble," but the resistance of the natives is weak and they prove easy victims. Fortunately the epidemics have always proven mild, but several unfortunates have died. I have heard that Ben is bound for Nome to join you—Vader holds something over him and thus forces him to do his bidding—and I cabled to warn you, but was advised that you had already departed. I hope that you left before Ben arrived.

Mart leaped to his feet and only the presence of the others prevented him from expressing his fury. "What wouldn't I give to get my hands on Vader," he cried, "and yet he is a small man and I am large. In every respect he has the advantage of me!"

Yes, it was a newsy letter, but there was more.

A Mr. Fremont passed through, outbound. He represents the firm from whom you bought your supplies, and was sent North to investigate the charge that defective ammunition and unfit canned goods had been sold you. He told me that a substitution had been made after the goods left their hands. He found the packing cases were those in which the goods were shipped, but the boxes, containing the cartridges, were different. He identified them as condemned supplies they had sold a water-front broker three years ago. It is obvious some one removed your high-grade supplies from the shipping cases and replaced them with this condemned stuff. Of course, we know who is back of it. And to save their own necks, Mr. Fremont is going to make it his business to find out. If the substitution was made after the supplies left their hands, and no doubt it was, the loss will fall on you, poor boy.

Well, I must close or this letter will weigh so much that the plane can't carry it. Good luck, Mart, I know that you are going to win.

Her loyalty touched him, naturally, but at present he could see only one thing, Ben Mowich visiting a native village and spreading the Taggart curse in the Arctic.

Among the schooner's crew, Mart searched anxiously for signs of throat trouble and found none. Of course, these boys had been in contact with whites for many years, and had been vaccinated.

He looked up Captain Jensen. "How soon can we start on Ben Mowich's trail, captain?" he demanded.

"What's wrong with Ben?" Jensen asked.

"Nothing, but I want to round him up," Mart answered. Once he caught Ben he would place him on some lonely island and keep him there until they were ready to come out. The Arctic was Mart's last stand this year and nothing must stand in the way of success.

"We'll start now," the skipper answered after a moment's thought. He

dimly remembered that there was some connection between Vader and Mowich, but, at present, he could not remember what it was. As soon as the schooner got under way, he read all of Vader's letters to him. But in none was Ben Mowich mentioned.

At the first village they reached, no fur remained, but some of Ben's supplies were there. They hurried on to the next and were twenty-four hours behind Ben. "Everybody seems well and happy," Mart reflected nervously, "but what will things be like after Ben's germs have had a chance to work?"

Ice blocked the next village and, in desperation, Mart went over the ice afoot. It was reported that Ben had paid a brief visit when the lead was open, had picked up considerable fur and was on his way. Where? No one knew.

The schooner drove through the next settlement. Ben had not appeared, so Mart gave it up and went to work. He was strongly tempted to make hay while the sun was shining, but his conscience would not permit him to let Ben run at large, exposing others to sickness and, perhaps, death. At the cost of several precious days, he ordered the schooner to return to Barrow.

"But, Mr. Taggart," the skipper protested, "I can't promise to make all the villages you plan to call at, unless we make the most of good weather conditions."

"Then I release you from that, captain. Return to Barrow. When we leave there again, use your own judgment. Call at as many places as you can, but," Mart drove home the last sentence, "be sure that we get around Point Barrow before it is too late. I can't be caught in the ice. I've got to go South without fail and take all the fur that I can with me."

"I understand, sir!" And the skipper headed for the settlement, where Mart prayed that he would find Ben Mowich.

CHAPTER XV.

"THE DANGED WOMEN."

VADER, marking time at Nome, was debating the necessity of going on to Barrow. The settlement was a difficult place to get into and equally difficult to get out of, except at tremendous expense now that planes were available. Besides there was always the chance that the planes would fall, while landing fields were few and far between. "With ten thousand dollars dangling in front of his eyes, Jensen won't be crazy enough to bring that schooner out this year. Then there is Ben Mowich and his germs. The Taggart curse is known in the Arctic. I can't see a chance of losing now. I'll stick here and take it easy," he reflected.

The decision was hardly made before he received a cable from Decatur:

Charter schooner for Arctic expedition. Instructions arriving on *Victoria*.

"And now what?" growled Vader, thoroughly aroused. "If Decatur is shooting that much money on an Arctic expedition, something has gone wrong in the South. And the old *Vic* is not due for three days."

He worked rapidly, however. He found a schooner in fair condition, the *Dusky Maid*, and several good Arctic sailors were always to be found on the beach. When the *Victoria* arrived, not three, but six days later, the *Dusky Maid* was almost ready for sea.

Vader waited fretfully for the mail to be distributed, and he was first at the window when it opened. "Vader?" he said briskly.

The clerk handed him a package tied with a string. It contained papers, letters, and magazines. He did not wait to go to his room, but searched

through until a bulky envelope bearing the Decatur return mark was unearthed.

Several familiar photographs were on top, scenes of the Taggart retail store windows in various parts of the country. Each one contained a neat card announcing;

"ADVANCE FALL SHOWINGS"

So plain were the photographs that Vader could identify the various furs displayed. There were silver, cross, white, black and red fox neck pieces. The pelts of stunted or dwarfed animals were displayed under the name, "Baby Fox." For, of course, the fur of a real baby fox, mink, fisher or ermine is worthless. There were coats of broadtail—sheep—and caracul—goat and so forth displayed, but the trimming was of fox in every instance.

The designers, employed by the Taggarts, had worked the Taggart personality into the different pieces. They had borrowed the best of Paris and American styles and added individuality to the combination.

Without a doubt, Mart's instructions were being obeyed to the letter. Being unable to obtain short-haired furs in quantity, they were pushing the long-haired fur and praying that the ladies would accept. To bring this about, they had gotten the jump on all rivals. From this moment, the ladies would talk, save, and scheme so that when the buying season did arrive it would come with a rush.

The pictures indicate their plan to get the jump on us, but we know they have but few foxes in storage and are depending entirely on what Silvertip's Cub can pick up. Don't let that schooner get out of the ice under any circumstances. Buy every fox pelt that you can get your hands on that is prime, or can be made to look prime. This desperate move of the Taggarts may fail, but you can never tell what the danged women will do.

Old Silvertip isn't around any more. Most people think that he's dead, but they are keeping the information quiet so as to not worry the Cub. Pass it along to the Cub, if you can. It'll keep his mind off the fur business.

Vader went through the entire file of papers and photographs carefully, then packed them away in a brief case. There was no escape from the Arctic trip now. He must go beyond Barrow, risk being frozen in for the winter and carry on the fight there. He rather hoped that Sazonovich might put in an appearance, but he was evidently busy far upriver. Vader set forth on this trip alone, except for the *Dusky Maid's* crew. Before he sailed, he wrote to his associate:

Send a good-looking lad, who is a fast talker, to Dead Man's Island. Gloria Vance has a lot of fine silver fur that we are going to need. Get it! Young Billings should be the boy for the job. He has a way with the girls and is easy to look at. See you this winter when the battle is over.

Due to a favorable summer, Vader's craft did not experience the ice-bucking that the *Sea Ranger* had encountered. They sailed and motored into the Arctic with no difficulty until in the vicinity of Point Barrow. Even then there was a lead open, but the lookout at the masthead exhibited considerable excitement and pointed to the westward. The captain scrambled into the rigging, and an exclamation of surprise escaped his lips. "The dead have come to life. It's the *Polar Fox* given up as lost a year ago. She's evidently just gotten free of the pack," he exclaimed.

"Has she any fur?" Vader inquired. If she had, what he was beginning to call Vader luck was still holding.

"No doubt!"

"Then we'll head for her," Vader answered, "I need fox fur and a lot of it. We can get around Point Barrow later. Chances are that Taggart has cleaned up along the coast anyway."

The other craft, badly battered from the beating that she had taken from the pack, approached slowly. Every man aboard was bearded, and the first thing that they asked for was news, then fresh vegetables.

"We have plenty of both," Vader answered, "send a line aboard. If you've got fur, we can do business right here."

For thirty-six hours the two craft lay abeam, while several thousand fox pelts were lowered into the *Dusky Maid's* hold. "This check will be good at Nome," Vader said as he paid cash for the fur, "and you'll be there in a few days." He sent several letters back with them, the while wondering if the craft could possibly hold together until she got there. Her wheel had been broken off, her sole power was her sails.

"Vader luck!" the man whispered softly to himself, "now if I can clean up a few more thousand, we'll be ready for anything. I'll get around Barrow and get out again with a good margin. I'll take no chances from now on."

But it was not in the cards that a man as greedy as Vader should not take chances. He heard where Mart Taggart had gone the moment that he arrived at Barrow. He decided to follow, reasoning that, by this time, the Taggart curse must be working nicely, and the natives giving Mart a wide berth.

CHAPTER XVI.

ICEBOUND.

BEN MOWICH was all grins when Taggart finally located him. The chartered umiak was comfortably ladened with pelts, the last of the trade goods were in Eskimo hands. He felt that he was entitled to a smile from Mart instead of the frown that the big man gave him as the umiak came alongside the *Sea Ranger*.

"Come below!" Mart ordered.

Surprised, the native followed. "What's the matter, Mr. Taggart?" he asked.

"Plenty, Mowich. Why didn't you tell me that you carried germs. You savvy, bugs in your throat. You breath 'em, make other people sick. Sore throat, savvy?"

"Sure, I savvy!" Mowich replied.

"Then why did you follow my men into the river country when you knew what followed?" Mart demanded hotly. "Why did you come up here?"

"Long story," Ben answered nervously. In his present angry mood, Mart seemed as terrible as Ivan Sazonovich.

Haltingly the tale was unfolded. The ever-observing Vader had discovered, when Mowich was his guide, that the epidemic always followed them at certain seasons of the year. He had first been examined himself, then directed Mowich to undergo tests also. Vader had emerged free, but the examining physician had pronounced Mowich a carrier, and explained to him the results of his contact with others.

Not desiring to inflict death and disease upon his own people, Mowich had become something of a hermit. But Vader, ready to open warfare upon his employer, laid the foundation of the plan which had proved so successful and rendered the name Taggart something to fly from. At first, Mowich absolutely refused to do such a thing. Verbal arguments and financial inducements failing, Vader had turned Sazonovich loose upon the helpless native. Ben Mowich had been carried into the dark room a struggling man with courage and spirit. He had emerged hours later, broken in body, the last of his spirit beaten from him, and all but broken in mind.

As Mart listened to the story, his throat felt as if some invisible hand were choking him, such was the depth

of his rage. It left him icy and, for the first time in his life, he hated.

The remainder of the story Mart guessed. The threat of another beating was sufficient to make Ben do Vader's bidding. To this was added the threat to turn him over to the health authorities as a germ carrier, which, Vader had said, might result either in his being imprisoned for life or shot to save the lives of others. Either threat was sufficient, but the two absolutely bound Ben Mowich to Vader.

"But see," Mowich said in conclusion, "I've got a paper, and they won't put me in jail. I work for you and you won't let Sazonovich hurt me?" His dark eyes searched Mart's face eagerly. "You won't let Sazonovich hurt me. If you keep him away, I work for you all my life for nothing. Work hard!"

"Well, you poor son of a gun!" said Mart who felt like crying, when he understood what Ben had gone through. "You're right, Sazonovich won't hurt you. And you won't work for nothing, either. You are going to be one of my top men when this is over with. Let's see the paper."

Mart examined the document with interest. It notified the world in general and Mart in particular that Ben Mowich had undergone a period of treatment, a throat operation and was no longer a carrier of germs. It recommended, however, that he be examined occasionally. "But why didn't you tell me this at Nome?" Mart asked.

"Afraid maybe you say no. Maybe think coupla germs hide where doctor can't find 'em, and raise big family," Mowich explained.

But even with Mowich's paper from the doctor, it was with some misgivings that both Mart and Ben returned to villages where they had called earlier in the season. Happy faces were awaiting their arrival. The fear that had accompanied a Taggart man's appearance in the river country was not present here. The name stood for fair dealing. They liked Mart, told him so, and invited him to come again.

One village remained to visit, and for this they laid a course when Captain Jensen assured Mart that the ice was safe enough, thanks to a late season.

As they rounded a lowland and cruised into a narrow harbor, the sturdy outlines of the *Dusky Maid* greeted them. It was their first knowledge of her presence in the ice. An exclamation of surprise came from Jensen's lips, and moved Mart to examine her through his own glasses. A single name fell from his lips, "Vader!" Again their trails had crossed. "And we meet on equal terms. I'm going to beat him for the sheer joy of showing him that, with an even break, it can be done," he reflected.

He was ashore in the first boat. Vader looked up with interest. "Hello, Taggart! Too late, I'm about to close a deal!" he remarked.

Ben Mowich spoke hurriedly in dialect and the chief, who was about to accept Vader's terms, hesitated. Vader flushed darkly, but increased his offer. Higher and higher went the bidding until, with a gesture of defeat, Vader quit.

"Not that I wanted the fur, particularly," Mart said coldly, "but to beat you. Until we arrived, your star was ascending. With our arrival, it reached its height. From now it will sink lower and lower, until it is gone. This is my first victory over you. It was long in coming, but it is here. A small thing, it is true, involving but a few hundred pelts, but a victory, the beginning of many."

"The hand is not played out yet, Taggart. I still hold a winning card

or two—still have an ace," Taggart told him.

"Up your sleeve, no doubt, that is the way that you usually play. That's all, Vader," Mart said.

"Not all. Perhaps you'd like to hear the news from outside. Perhaps you'd like to know that Silvertip Taggart is dead and that he died, believing that his son had failed to make good."

That hurt! Vader could see the depths of the wound, the tremendous effort to gain control of himself, an effort that failed for several moments. Mart turned away and sobbed his grief, even as he cursed the bearer of the news. He did not notice Vader catch Mowich by the arm and swing him about; he was too filled with emotion to see what happened.

Ben turned with some degree of fear in his eyes but, sensing Mart's grief, his own courage returned. "See, got a paper now, that says I am all right. Vader, you go jump in the bay. You can't scare me. I'm all well."

"But," Vader answered, "the paper says nothing of Ivan Sazonovich. Somewhere, some time, in a dark room, Ivan will settle with you."

The *Dusky Maid* left first, the *Sea Ranger* followed as soon as the fur could be taken aboard.

The first rush of grief over with, Mart regained his composure, except for a gnawing something within, which he felt might continue for days. Perhaps, at Nome, there would be a letter from Beaver Dupree breaking the news, but it was more than likely that Beaver would wait until he could tell Mart. Nor had Mart forgotten Vader's written offer to Jensen for ten thousand dollars, if the *Sea Ranger* failed to get to Nome. Jensen had avoided Vader at the village, as Vader had avoided Jensen. This, of course, was doubtless part of the game. Merely a curt greeting had passed between them.

Straight to the settlement they raced where mail, of no particular importance, had arrived. The Coast Guard cutter, *Bear,* had completed, as usual, her "farewell voyage," but old-timers were predicting that she would arrive next year again as surely as the sun. No newer vessel could replace her. The bulk of the mail was doubtless being held at Nome. "Better hurry," Ben Mowich whispered to Mart as they were saying farewell: "I heard *Dusky Maid* skipper say ice was moving down, and might get caught for winter."

Mart did not wait, but hurried aboard. "All ready, captain!"

Without a word, Captain Jensen, a strangely silent man, Mart had decided, got under way. Yes, silent, and difficult to figure, but a fighter. "And if he shows any sign of slackening speed," Mart promised himself, "he will sure have a fine old fight on his hands."

During the days immediately following, Vader hardly slept, but spent hours at a time on deck, despite the cold which once froze the hood of his parka to his face. "Keep her going! Keep her going!" he told his skipper, again and again.

And the skipper kept her going. The pack came down upon them, grinding, piling up and falling back again. Pressure ridges formed, as edges were crumpled up, and some place must be found for the extra ice. It was a tremendous sight, in a way, as amazing as the glacier. But there were vastly more of it, thousands of square miles of ice coming down from the North; and no vessel made could withstand the ice, if caught at certain angles. Man's only defense was skill and experience.

Even Vader's skipper faltered at last. "Let's see what Jensen is going to do," he said to Vader. "Jensen is a

better man than I am. He's the best man in the Arctic."

"I know all that," Vader answered, "but we're not interested in Jensen. He may decide to winter in."

The other looked at Vader curiously. "Winter in?" he asked.

"Yes, winter in. He is my friend. Taggart and I are rivals. Understand? Then don't be surprised, if the ice pack drives Jensen back to a safe place."

But Jensen was not driven back that day nor the next. Back and forth, the ice carried the two helpless schooners. Now and then, a lead opened, but not of sufficient length to risk making a dash around the point.

Then in the gray of a cold dawn, the *Dusky Maid* suddenly began driving full speed ahead, all hands on deck, fending off ice that might get into her wheel. Less than a mile behind, the *Sea Ranger* followed. Vader hurried to the masthead. As far as he could see, ice—restless, moving ice—blocked their way. But, here and there, he saw open water. They could crash through, if their vessel were stout enough. He slowed down once, then the lead opening for nearly a mile at some whim of the ice, he speeded up once more. "What did I tell you?" Vader suddenly shouted in triumph, "Captain Jensen is turning back." Then to himself, he added, "And Taggart will have a fine time convincing any one that it was ten thousand dollars and not sound judgment in ice navigation that turned him back."

He returned to the deck in high glee. Mart Taggart was beaten again, and this was final.

Mart Taggart, in the rigging of the *Sea Ranger,* felt rather than saw the craft slacken speed. Ahead, the *Dusky Maid* was bucking the floes to open water beyond. The moment that he had been expecting had arrived, but he remained cool.

The *Sea Ranger* swung slowly to starboard, then turned back. Mart's fists clenched. He walked up to the wheel house. "What is wrong, captain?" he asked.

"Can't make it!" Jensen replied shortly.

"But the *Dusky Maid* is plugging away," Mart observed.

"Her skipper is a fool, sir. He'll be caught and crushed. I know this ice. I know exactly what is going to happen, as near as it is given any man to know what the ice will do next. We are turning back to a safe place. Otherwise we'll be on the beach."

Mart breathed hard as he turned away. Not yet must he make the break. Perhaps this *was* sound judgment. He was not just sure, yet. But if their ship became icebound, then he proposed to take it out of the skipper's hide. And poor satisfaction it would be, indeed, if the *Dusky Maid* continued on her way. He climbed into the rigging again. The other vessel was hidden. A floe, carrying a large pressure ridge, had drifted between them. He saw the floe continue, then pile up on the beach with a tremendous crash! Where was the *Dusky Maid?* Caught? Helpless? What?

No! She was clear, scooting down an open lead as fast as her limited power and the aid of a sail could carry her. She was almost around the point, where the pack would carry her with it, rather than block her passage.

Again Mart Taggart hurried to the deck. He knew exactly what constituted mutiny. When at sea, the captain is supreme. Not even the owner, much less a charterer, could give him orders. He stood or fell by his judgment. As his was the responsibility, so was his the command and judgment. He could resist influence at the point of a gun, if need be. He could even decree the death penalty, if the safety

of his ship and passengers depended upon it.

And yet Mart could not stand idly by and again go down to defeat with victory almost within grasp. The captain was in his cabin, the vessel in charge of the mate. Mart got to the point at once. "Are we beaten, captain?" he asked.

"Not yet, but it is not safe to proceed. I shall make fast, and wait. Then it is up to the pack. If it is in a kindly mood, we may be free, or we may remain for the winter."

"The *Dusky Maid* is going ahead," Mart said hotly, "why can't you?"

"You said that before, Taggart. My answer is the same. Her captain is either a fool, or Vader has talked him into risking ship, crew, and cargo. In that case, he is doubly a fool. Before you say anything more, let me remind you that I am in command, and that you are a passenger."

"And let me remind you, Captain Jensen," Mart threatened, "that, if this ship is caught in the ice and the *Dusky Maid* gets through, I'm going to stage a protest that you'll remember. I'm not going to be beaten, when it is within my power to stop it. Get that under your parka hood and remember it." Mart stalked out.

For an hour he paced the deck nervously. A flurry of snow came from somewhere, then was gone. Overhead the sky was leaden, all leads to the point were blocked. But, beyond, he could see the tops of the *Dusky Maid's* masts; could see, with the aid of binoculars, Vader looking back at him. He could not see, but he could well imagine the thin lips, drawn over the yellow teeth, in a grin of triumph.

"Crash! Crash! Grind! Grind! Thump! Thump!" The uproar was constant, as if all the fiends of the ice were jeering.

Captain Jensen came on deck again. He looked around, the schooner slackened speed, came to a stop, and several men went onto the ice with lines. They drove anchors into the ice, or cut toggles, and made the lines secure. "The old man decided not to risk it, I guess," a sailor observed, "he played safe."

"Then we are icebound?" Mart demanded.

"Yeah, that's about the size of it," was the answer.

Again Mart went into the rigging. The *Dusky Maid* was almost around the point. He looked down to the deck and saw the skipper entering the cabin. A few seconds later Mart followed. He stripped off his parka. "You yellow crook," he snarled, "for ten thousand dollars you've sold out what honor you had and helped Vader beat me."

"Get out of the cabin, you young fool!" Jensen advanced, then, sensing that Mart was about to strike, beat him to the punch. Mart went down with a crash and, as he got up, swung the door shut. He did not want any one to interfere now. At last he had a man his physical equal, if not his superior. The pent-up emotion of months burst like the backwater of a dam. Jensen reached for an automatic pistol, hanging from a belt on the wall, but Mart knocked it from his hands.

Toe to toe, they slugged a moment, then, coming to grips, went down with a crash that must have shaken the schooner's timbers. They were fighting as they rolled about the floor, fighting as they stood up again. Mart was bleeding from a cut on the mouth and another over the eye, but the skipper was also bleeding. He found grim satisfaction in this as he renewed the attack. Minutes passed and there was no let-up.

A steward, entering to see if the skipper wanted a cup of hot tea, gazed in amazement, then retired. Mart knocked the skipper down, then locked

the door, and was in turn knocked down himself. He caught Jensen's legs and upset him. Once more they rolled over and over, slugging at every opportunity. A chair was overturned and fell in the way, then crushed under the impact of two hundred pounds of fighting flesh.

Their clothing hung in shreds. Men were pounding at the door, but neither paid the slightest attention. It was long in coming, but the opening that Mart sought came at last. His fist broke through Jensen's guard and caught him flush on the jaw. The big sailor's legs sagged. Twice more Mart's fist smashed home, then Jensen dropped. He tried to get up again, smiled a terrible smile through his battered face, then slumped back, gasping.

Mart leaned weakly against the wall. In the passageway leading to the cabin, he heard shuffling feet, then a mighty crash broke the door down. The mate stood there, followed by the engineer, and two seamen. As they rushed in to attack, Ben Mowich brought a seaman down from behind. Ben and the other seaman staged a private battle in the narrow passage, as the mate and engineer rushed Mart.

The mate went down and completely out from one punch; but the engineer, being a bit weak on fist fighting and adept with a spanner, laid Mart low. In the midst of the wreckage, the engineer stood, spanner in hand. Mowich was besting the seaman, so the engineer reached forth and tapped him lightly with the spanner. He went down with a grunt. The seaman fell on the deck, breathing heavily. Outside, the pack snarled and growled at the *Sea Ranger's* stout hull.

With an effort Mart Taggart opened his eyes and gazed about. The skipper managed to get to his feet. He looked about, then down. "Put Taggart in irons," he ordered. "Mutiny!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A BREATHING SPELL.

WHEN Mart Taggart's head cleared sufficiently for him to realize all that had taken place, he found himself on the losing end, as usual. "I'm sure getting used to the short end," he muttered, "but as long as it doesn't dampen my spirit I won't worry."

He took stock. Vader and his schooner, the *Dusky Maid,* were almost around Point Barrow and the freedom beyond. His captain, Jensen, had turned back declaring the ice unsafe. Mart remembered that. He also remembered that, months previous, Vader had written Jensen promising him ten thousand dollars cash if he kept the *Sea Ranger,* laden with Mart's furs, from getting clear of the ice. Mart had put two and two together, then started what amounted to mutiny. He had whipped the skipper in a fair fight, knocked out the mate and had, in turn, been knocked cold by the engineer swinging a spanner. Now he was in the cabin wearing irons.

The skipper was washing off the marks of battle, so far as they could be washed off. He would carry some of them for days. As he dried his face gently with a towel, he surveyed Mart with critical eyes. Mart grinned. "Some battle, eh, captain? It didn't settle anything, but it relieved my emotions, and showed you exactly what I think of you and how you stand."

"Mutiny, you young fool, is a federal offense and you are guilty. Still, you fought fair, which surprised me in a Taggart." He walked across the room, and unlocked the irons. "Wash up," he said briefly.

"Thanks," Mart answered, equally brief. Together they replaced their garments torn in the battle. A steward was cleaning up the cabin, his eyes twinkling. He had not seen much of the row, but what he had was fine.

A sudden shout from the deck brought the skipper to his feet. "Come along, Taggart, I think that my judgment is about to be confirmed. The *Dusky Maid's* skipper was a fool."

Mart was almost a minute behind Jensen. When he reached the deck, the latter was in the rigging as were most of the crew. Some were looking through glasses; others were waiting their turn and, in the meantime, peering with straining eyes at an Arctic drama.

The *Dusky Maid* was caught!

To Mart the drab schooner became something living, fleeing in terror from the jaws of a closing trap. With clear water on all sides, nevertheless she was caught. Running full speed ahead, she hurled herself at a barrier. Her bows rose high, then settled. Ice spumed up from below, then slowly she slipped back and wallowed in the lead. Twice she tried it, while nearer and nearer came the ragged edge of the floe—white fangs of the trap's jaws.

Men were working furiously, bringing up belongings and the more expensive fur from the holds; a small umiak was being made ready to launch. Time might be brief, or it might be hours. No one could tell what would happen between the crushing and the sinking. The floes came together, one grounded on shore, seemingly immovable, the others backed by the great Arctic pack, a force irresistible. And the point of contact was the hinge of the closing jaw. The ice beyond seemed to swirl and, with the swirling, move forward. It caught the schooner gently at first, then smashed it with cold fury against the other jaw. She lifted a full three feet, then settled back, dying. The umiak was lowered and hauled over the ice. Bale after bale of fur was tossed to the men on the floe, who hauled them beyond the danger point and returned for more. In their midst, Vader could be seen working like a madman. Then suddenly those aboard leaped to the ice; the schooner settled down lower and lower; the planking of her decks creaked, then heaved upward; her masts slanted and the shrouds grew slack. Lower and lower she settled, then the first sea, filled with broken ice, spilled over her rail and cascaded about in rushing swirls. The masts were drawn smoothly below the surface like periscopes being drawn into a submarine. Ice-choked seas eddied over the spot, then jaw met jaw, interlocked, lifted from the pressure, and there was neither water nor wreckage—just scattered men and scattered bales.

Mart Taggart was serious as he descended to the deck. The drama had sobered them all and brought the realization that their own craft was no stronger than the *Dusky Maid* had been. Mart walked up to the skipper. "Captain, I apologize. I believed that a motive other than sound judgment was back of your retreat," he said.

There was no triumph in the skipper's eyes. He did not like to have his judgment confirmed at the expense of a wrecked schooner. He nodded briefly and made plans for the rescue. Mart remained aboard, as he would have been of small value. The crew alternately rowed through leads and hauled by main strength their craft over the ice. Two hours later they returned with a portion of the fur and all of the wrecked crew except a small party that was coming slowly with the umiak. The skin boat was also laden with salvage.

As richly as Vader deserved his bad fortune, Mart had no desire to appear to gloat. Rather than permit even a suggestion of triumph, he retired to his quarters when Vader boarded the *Sea Ranger*. And when Captain Jensen entered the cabin, followed by Vader, some time later, Mart retired after a clipped greeting.

He knocked on the mate's door and the latter bellowed, "Come in!" There was a moment's tenseness. Not so many hours before Mart had knocked this same mate cold with a single punch. He eyed the seaman with an interest that was returned by the mate who gingerly rubbed his jaw. "A terrible kick, Taggart. If I packed a blow like that, I'd be after the heavyweight champion of the world and not in the fur business." He lowered his voice. "With me it's all in the day's work, but, boy, you are in a mess if Jensen wants to prosecute. That was mutiny. What was the row about?"

"It——" began Mart then, at a gesture from the mate, remained silent. There was more trouble in the skipper's cabin.

Jensen's voice came clear and distinct. "I'll take you either to Nome, or you can go back to Point Barrow. That goes for the crew, also."

"But, captain," Vader protested, "I thought that you planned to winter in."

"Not if I can get out," was the answer.

"But——" Vader began.

"See here, Vader," the skipper interrupted impatiently, "I know what you are driving at. I'd heard that you were crooked, but because you were, I said *were*, not *are*, my friend, I refused to believe what I heard. Yes, I got the letter you sent by Mowich, and I got your offer. Ten thousand dollars for a seaman's honor is pretty cheap. I wouldn't sell my honor, nor betray a man who has hired my skill, for all the fur in the Arctic. Now get out! I'd hoped that our trails would never cross again, but the fortune of the sea so wills it. I hate to find that friend is not a man." He said this in a lower tone, almost to himself, as if what he had discovered in Vader hurt.

Again there was silence in the captain's cabin. Presently Vader's brisk tread came down the passageway. In a few moments it was followed by the skipper's heavy, measured step. He knocked. "Mr. Taggart?"

"Here, captain!" Mart opened the door.

"I'd like to see you, sir!" And with that Captain Jensen returned to his quarters.

The mate shook his head. "He's in a solemn mood, sir. It looks bad for you. The skipper is a fair man, sir, but a hard one, a very hard one."

Mart entered the cabin.

"Sit down, sir! I've just realized why you attacked me. Of course, you did not go through my private papers, but you knew that Vader offered me a bribe to keep you here this winter?" Jensen asked.

"Yes, captain," Mart answered frankly, "I did. I watched you at first because you frankly stated that you did not like me and that you were a friend of Vader's. But, as time wore on and I knew you better, I could not reconcile your high sense of honor with bribery. I thought, after all, that you were on the square until the *Dusky Maid* went ahead, and you turned back. Then I remembered, but I refused to be beaten by dishonesty without a fight, even though it be called mutiny."

"Sometimes, Taggart, I enjoy a clean fight. It clears the air. You fought fairly. All summer I've watched you and you have dealt fairly. In the Arctic this year, I lost a friend, but I gained another and, I believe, lasting friend, Taggart." He extended his hand.

"Just a moment before accepting, captain. As you said, I did not go through your private papers, but I did get my information from that source. Remember the day when the plane arrived at Barrow? The wind scattered the papers about and I picked them up. I could not help but see Vader's offer," Mart told him.

"You did a human act," Jensen an-

swered. They shook hands. "And now for a look about, for I haven't entirely given up hope of getting out. I know what it means to you, Mart."

For ten days they remained icebound, then a whim of the pack opened a few leads. With the salvaged furs jammed into the holds and all hands holding their respective breaths, the *Sea Ranger* smashed around the point and moved southward with the pack.

The inward emotions of Vader, when Jensen succeeded in rounding Point Barrow, were written on his face. Perhaps he saw that his star really was descending. But he was still hopeful that something would happen, or that he could make something happen. But everywhere that he went he was watched. The engineer ordered him from the engine room the moment that he appeared; and, when Vader protested, the man caught up the same spanner he had used so successfully on Mart Taggart's head and remarked, "Get out and stay out! I know you, Vader, for what you are, so does every man aboard. Watch yourself. Take an old man's advice, crookedness don't pay."

But Vader gave his soul scant thought and good advice even less. At Nome, his worst fears were realized when a cable confirmed the fear that the Taggarts continued to lead in style. The Decatur chain of stores was doing a nice business, but the trend was clearly toward what the Taggarts were showing.

At the cable office, there were two messages that were almost duplicates. The one to Mart read:

Bring the Vance Island silvers back with you. BEAVER DUPREE.

And Vader's read:

All efforts to buy Vance fur failed. Use any necessary method, but get it. Serious silver shortage. DECATUR.

Mart stood on guard until the last of his fur had gone into the staunch old *Victoria's* holds, then he said farewell to Captain Jensen. Two good friends were parting. "You can always count on my schooner, crew and myself, Mart, whenever you go into the ice," Jensen told him.

The engineer extended a greasy hand that had been carefully wiped with a handful of waste. "And you won't think too hard of me for whacking you with the spanner, sir?" he asked.

"That is one of my bright memories, chief," Mart answered, "there were so many stars shining immediately afterwards." Then he boarded the lighter, followed by Ben Mowich carrying his bags. In Mart's pocket there was a certified check from Vader that gave him considerable satisfaction. It represented fifty per cent of the furs saved from the *Dusky Maid* salvage money. He also carried enough Russian sable for Flora Maynard's promised coat. With considerable enthusiasm, he thumped Ben Mowich on the back. "Old son, we are sitting pretty right now. Let's enjoy the breathing spell. Something tells me that a lot of unfinished business remains and that it will be completed at Dead Man's Island," he told him.

He walked to the *Victoria's* stern and looked down into the seething water, churned by the screw. A wave of sadness swept over him. "Poor old dad," he said softly, "too bad you couldn't have seen the finish of this fight, or, better still, have taken part in it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOW BIDDER.

THE snap of autumn was in the air. Leaves were turning, and, in the higher country, snow was driving miners out. Trappers' cabins were stocked with grub; the fingerling salmon had gone down the river to the

sea; the traps were set for wary fur-bearing creatures.

Gloria Vance and Mary were branding furs. This was not done with a branding iron as one might expect; but the process consisted of punching tiny holes with a specially designed punch. Each brand formed a perfect "V" and stood for Vance. All Vance Island fox pelts had been so branded. And now that most of the Vance Island foxes were on Dead Man's Island, the latter product also bore the mark.

Here, indeed, was a fortune in silver pelts, branded and baled. Gloria straightened up and tossed her punch aside. "There, that is the last. I do wish that some one from the Taggart company would come and take them. Of course, with William on guard——" she hesitated and became very thoughtful. Almost anything could happen even with William on guard.

Armed with a sawed-off shotgun, William watched the fur each night. But, by day, he flirted with the squaw flapper. He was flirting at the present moment, much to Mary's concern. Bit by bit, William seemed to be slipping from her fingers. She lacked the style of her rival; and man, native and white, is given to seeing the surface rather than the hidden qualities of the fair sex. What William needed was an awakening, and no one was around to do it.

The river steamer was due on her final trip of the season, if she made it. Her skipper slipped over sand bars and jolted through rapids, the while complaining that there wasn't enough water left to float a duck. Winter's grip in the mountains had materially cut down the water supply. He made it to Vance Glacier but could not get through the rapids above, whereupon he sent his cargo to the bank, turned, and fled. Pack trains could carry the stuff the remainder of the way. The skipper couldn't.

Gloria Vance, awaiting the steamer's appearance, was mildly surprised to see a group of men walking along the bank. From their dress she knew that they were steamer passengers. "So he couldn't make it," she said thoughtfully. "I should have sent my fur out on the last steamer and stored it in town; but I was so afraid that something would happen. Whoever buys it will have to take it out by canoe or boat."

She examined the group through her binoculars, and an exclamation of surprise escaped her. "Vader! And he was supposed to be in the Arctic. Well, that means trouble! William! Oh, William!" she called.

"Coming!" William answered.

"Vader is back, so you had better stop flirting and get some sleep. That fur, at present prices, is worth between eighty and one hundred thousand dollars and there are men in this world who will go to a lot of trouble for one hundred thousand dollars," Gloria told him.

William headed for his cabin and sleep. The squaw flapper stepped into her little dugout and returned home. She was a trim, if artificial, miss and she believed in carrying the fight into the enemy's territory, for William was a man worth winning.

Dead Man's Island grew quiet immediately thereafter. Several natives from the village returned for their noon meal; William slept; Mary performed her household duties and Gloria, now that all the fur was branded, turned to her badly neglected correspondence.

There was a quick step outside, then a light knock at the door. "Come in," the girl called, supposing that it was a native.

The door opened, and Mart Taggart completely filled the doorway. He was so glad to see her that his arms involuntarily opened and gathered her in.

He gave her not one, but several, what he intended to be brotherly kisses. But, when a man kisses a girl more than twice with the enthusiasm that Mart displayed, he ceases to be a brother or even a friend. For a moment she relaxed in the joy of seeing him, then he felt the strong, young body grow stiff in his arms, and she stepped back. "Oh, Mart, you shouldn't!" she reproached him.

"I'm sorry. I did not intend to be so enthusiastic. But Gloria, it is so good to see you again. Just like returning home. And now let's hear everything," Mart said.

Several miles above Dead Man's Island there was a group of abandoned cabins, marking the spot where once had been a small placer strike. Gathered about were several men who had not seen each other in some time and had much to say. As they talked, a canoe came downstream, then turned in toward the bank. The group ran down to greet the last arrival. "Sazonovich, you are two days late," Vader cried.

"Ah, master, much has happened. Your orders to bring fox fur did not reach me until late. This girl, this Gloria Vance, was buying and the Indians sent their fox fur to her," the Russian answered.

"Come up to the cabin, have a drink, and let's plan. Billings, you say that you've tried to buy and she won't sell?" Vader asked.

"I have tried all summer to arrange a private sale. She is firm. I think that she suspects that I am connected with you and she will starve first."

"Then we'll frame on her. If that don't bring the fur, we'll try a method that will," Vader answered.

"Benton!" Vader addressed a man obviously from the city. "You drop in shortly after we do, say that you represent the independents, and start bidding against us. Taggart will probably be there by this time. But, no matter how high he goes, you go a thousand dollars higher. We've got to have those pelts."

"And if its gets too high?" Benton inquired.

"Keep your eye on me. When I say, 'I'm licked!' you make two more bids and stop."

"Yes, sir!" Benton answered.

"Now for the other plan, in case we can't buy them. I want every fur that we have in this district brought to these cabins. I want you to brand and store them. Here is our brand." He picked up a new punch, and marked a sheet of paper *"V."*

"But that is pretty close to the Vance brand," Billings observed.

"It is the Vance brand," Vader answered, "and a little more. There is a bar beneath. What is to prevent one adding a bar to a fur branded with only a V?"

Billings and Benton whistled. "So that is the game, eh?"

"That is the game," Vader admitted. "Dangerous, but worth while, if successful. And I defy any one to hang the trick on us. The V of our brand is an exact duplicate of the Vance V." Vader stood up, indicating that the conference was over. "The rest of you boys hit the ball. Billings, you and I are going down to talk fur with the fair Gloria. Benton, you drop downstream, then approach on the cabin side of the island. Tell them that you came up by canoe, that you missed the steamer."

Billings and Vader waited a sufficient length of time to enable Benton to drop below Dead Man's Island, then followed. Benton was bucking the current as the pair came in sight of the landing. They waited for him to land and enter the cabin before putting in an appearance.

"I know just how popular I am in these parts," Vader said boldly, "but

business is business. We are here to bid on the entire lot, Miss Vance."

"They are not for sale to you at any price," she answered.

"Just a moment," Mart interrupted, "you owe it to yourself to accept the highest bid. We are in the saddle and can go as high as the next. If we can't, then the other fellow deserves the lot, and you are entitled to the high price."

"As an independent," Benton added, "I think that Mr. Taggart is quite right."

"Well, perhaps," the girl said slowly, but she was thinking fast. "By the way, Mr. Benton, how did you arrive?"

"I arrived by canoe, Miss Vance. Missed the steamer and came all the way on my own. That's how badly I want your fur. I'm ready to give these gentlemen a run for their money. Let's look it over," he added.

She led the way to the building in which the fur was stored. There was a sample of each lot for inspection, and Benton examined each one with a critical eye. "Sixty thousand dollars for the lot," he said, "that should start something."

"Seventy thousand," Vader snapped, "just to show you that we mean business."

"Eighty-five thousand," bid Mart, "let's get the price up to somewhere near their value, we'll do it in the end."

"Ninety thousand," said Benton.

"Ninety-five," shouted Vader.

"Ninety-six," said Mart.

"Ninety-six, five hundred," bid Vader.

"An even hundred thousand," Mart countered, "that is a good price."

"I'm licked," signaled Vader.

"A hundred and ten thousand," bid Benton.

Mart did some figuring. "The lot is yours," he said, "a hundred thousand is as strong as I can go."

All present looked at Gloria. "If I were sure, Mr. Benton, that you are not one of the Vader crowd I might be tempted to accept your offer," she said.

"If you can prove, Miss Vance, that I am not exactly what I represent myself to be, or that I have deceived you in any way, I will pay five thousand dollars to any charity that you name," Benton told her.

The girl's eyes flashed. "Will you shake on that?" she challenged.

"Sure will!" Benton extended his hand.

"Thanks," said Gloria, "you lose. You said that you had paddled all the way up the river, and that was an attempt at deception. If you had paddled five miles upstream with those soft hands, they would be a mass of blisters. Mr. Taggart, the fur is yours, at one hundred thousand dollars. This is one time the low bidder is high."

Without comment, the others took their departure; but Benton was very red in the face, as he followed Vader to the landing.

CHAPTER XIX.

SHADOWS!

SHADOWS flitted about Dead Man's Island. They came from upstream in a shadowy canoe; they emerged from a swirl of the first good snowstorm of the season, and moved silently through the timber of the island. Then one, larger than the others, approached the fur storeroom. It was Sazonovich, deadly in his present mood. He waited nearly an hour for his chance, while the cold all but numbed his long fingers. William laid down the sawed-off gun for a moment, while he drank a cup of hot tea. Then the Russian struck. Just a single blow of the fist crumpled William up. With one hand, he lifted the man, while he struck twice more with the other.

This done, he thrust the uncon-

scious man into a loft, picked up all the fur that he could carry, and ran to the river bank. Again shadows flitted through the storm. There were many of them and, in a brief time, every pelt had been removed to the waiting canoe. Sturdy paddlers forced the craft upstream, where equally quick work was necessary to transfer the fur to Vader's storehouse. The bales were broken open; their covering destroyed; the pelts were rebranded with a bar under the V, and rebaled with different coverings.

Billings, Benton, and two others were ordered into a canoe and told to paddle for town. "And let everybody see you," Vader ordered. "We want you to act as decoys and cross up the pursuit."

Like a shadow the craft passed downstream. Ben Mowich, rising early, saw it. He yawned, as it disappeared, then wandered out to talk to William. Ten seconds later his shouts aroused the whole settlement. Mart Taggart thrust his head from a cabin window, jerked it back in again and dressed while, from the main cabin, came Gloria and Mary. Mary's long hair was trailing down her back, while Gloria's bob looked fairly presentable.

"The fur is gone. William is gone!" yelled Ben. His voice was heard across the river, and presently dugouts put out to investigate. The squaw flapper was the first to arrive. And it was she who found William, conscious, but helpless.

They carried him to the main cabin and thawed him out. He knew nothing of what happened. In fact, he asked rather than answered questions. While the flapper held his head, the practical Mary prepared a hot drink.

Mart came in on the run. "Not a trace," he announced, "the snow covers everything. Of course, they used a canoe and are doubtless heading downstream. Ben, you go ashore and scout along the bank, locate Vader's cabins, and tell me who is there. I'm going downstream as fast as I can."

Abruptly Ben remembered the canoe. "Hurry and you can catch 'em," he directed.

Without breakfast Mart disappeared, the canoe leaping almost from the water with each powerful stroke. As he swept by the glacier, there was a moment's struggle to keep from being drawn in toward the mighty mass. He remembered Gloria's terror of the falling ice and wondered if it had worn off.

At noon he managed to overtake Benton and Billings. Obviously they were frightened, but they put up a good talk. "We're clearing out," Benton said. "Vader was sore because he lost out. He said that there wasn't room in camp for us."

But this failed to satisfy the suspicious Mart. He drove on downstream at top speed until an ice jam blocked his way. An examination proved that no craft had passed this place during the night. Caching the canoe, he took the river trail back, trotting most of the way.

Ben Mowich was back at Dead Man's Island, when Mart returned. He reported that Vader, Sazonovich and several others were at the Vader cabins. But he was unable to say whether or not there was any excitement. Mart rather suspected that the Russian's presence had occupied Mowich's mind to the exclusion of all except casual observations. "I'm going to have a look at that fur," he announced, "and I don't care particularly just what methods I use to accomplish my purpose. The stolen stuff did not go downstream, so it went up."

"Mart paddled a small canoe to within a half mile, then cached it. He approached with caution and looked the situation over. Smoke came from one main cabin, while the snow about the others was disturbed, indicating a con-

siderable tramping about. "I'm on the right trail," he muttered, "they've been carrying heavy loads or the snow wouldn't be packed down that way. I wonder if I can have a look without being caught in the act."

He made it to one of the cabins unobserved, and had little trouble crawling through a window. The moment he poked his head into the room he knew that the furs were stored there. Squirming the remainder of the way in, he crouched and listened. There was no sound except the hum of men's voices, and he could distinguish no words. Mart ripped open the first bale and found, as he expected, silver fox furs. Eagerly he examined the brand, but his satisfaction in discovering the familiar V vanished, when he noticed the bar beneath. For an hour he remained, searching through the bales for evidence and finding none. "I am sure that this is a part of the stolen fur, but I can't prove it. Certainly this did not come from wild, interior foxes," he reflected.

He peered from the window again to assure himself that all was quiet. A native emerged from the timber, his eyes on the snow or else darting swiftly from side to side. "He's trailing me," Mart growled uneasily, "and now what! I've got to clear out! But, just for luck, I'm going to take a pelt with me for Gloria's examination."

Chancing observation from the cabin rather than expose himself to the trailing Indian, Mart stepped into view, ran to the cover of another building, which he then used to cover his escape, and finally plunged into the brush. He waded a small creek for several hundred yards, crawled to the bank, and doubled back. The inquisitive Indian had found Mart's trail up the bank, but he had not discovered the hidden canoe. Mart shot downstream at top speed. Things would be happening now, for surely the native would report strange footprints leading to the fur cache.

He leaped ashore on Dead Man's Island, dragged the canoe up beyond the danger point, and hurried to Gloria's cabin. Mary rushed out to meet him. "Where is Gloria?" she asked nervously.

"Isn't she here?" A wave of fear surged through Mart.

"No, she took your trail. She hoped to overtake you before you reached Vader's cabin. She wanted to tell you of a private mark on her fur in case they had put on another brand. That is what always worried her, the fear that the fur would be stolen and that she could never prove that it was her's."

"What is the hidden brand?" Mart demanded hastily.

"Inside of the left ear, there are three dots made with the point of an indelible pencil."

Mart handed Mary the pelt that he had taken from Vader's fur cache. "Is that one of them?" he asked.

She turned back the left ear. There were three purple dots, made with the point of an indelible pencil cleverly concealed within. "I made those marks myself," Mary said confidently.

"Good! Now how many of the boys on the island, here, are willing to mix in a fight?" was Mart's next question.

"I can get two men, and William will go as soon as he hears that Gloria is out there alone!"

"Fine. Your two, William, Ben Mowich and I make five. There are six or seven hanging around Vader's. Get your two men. We've got to move fast. Tell them to bring their guns."

William had recovered from his experience, except for a headache which put him in a sullen, fighting mood. He said little to Mary and even less to the squaw flapper who was about as usual. Mart liked the way that William agreed to accompany him.

They did not paddle upstream, but followed the course taken by Gloria. She had crossed to the south bank and picked up a trapper's trail, the same one that Mart had followed earlier in the day. Her moccasined imprints were well defined. They continued for nearly a mile, then were joined by another and larger pair of footprints. Reading the message on the snow, it was evident Gloria had talked a moment, then started to retreat, only to be caught and carried bodily off. William also agreed that this was the case, for the girl's tracks vanished; but the man's were deeper from that point, proving that he carried a burden. Ben Mowich's face paled slightly. "Sazonovich's has got her. I know his tracks." Some tremendous reaction was taking place within Ben Mowich, for his face abruptly lost its expression of fear and became livid with rage. "He can't take her," he panted. "He can't! I'm going to kill!" Then he was off on the run, setting a pace that Mart found difficult to maintain.

Mart stopped Ben by main strength as they neared Vader's cabins. "We've got to use strategy, or they'll shoot you down," he warned. "Hello, things are happening!"

Seven men were in sight, loading a big canoe under Sazonovich's instructions. The bales that Mart had seen in the cache were already stowed. Vader stood apart, smoking, his manner extremely nervous. Something had sapped his supreme confidence. Perhaps he believed that his star was still descending.

Suddenly he tossed the half-smoked cigarette aside and entered a cabin less than one hundred yards from where they stood. Mart turned at the sound of a slight rustle. Ben Mowich was running lightly toward the cabin. Whatever civilization he had acquired fell from him as he saw that the man who had wronged him was in that cabin alone. With an impatient gesture, he hurled the automatic pistol that he carried aside and drew a knife, the weapon of the savage in close quarters. "Ben!" ordered Mart in a low voice, fearful that his act would upset their plans, "Ben! Come back here. Come back here!"

But there was no stopping Ben. This moment had been too long in coming.

"Easy, boys," Mart warned the others, "we want to get the drop on them!"

William touched Mart's shoulder. "See, two more come. That makes nine. There're five of us."

"Then we've got to surprise them!" Mart decided. "No shooting, unless they start it. We don't want to have Vader use his influence to hang a murder charge on any of us. Come a-running, boys, we've got to rush 'em now. Sazonovich saw Mowich crawl through that cabin window."

And Mart led the attack. Taken by surprise, the others had no time to rush for their guns; and, confident that they had the advantage, Mart's men did not use their's. All they wanted was that canoe load of fur. Mart and the Russian faced each other at a distance of one hundred yards and rushed. Out of the corner of his eye, Mart noticed that two unexpected strangers were also rushing to join in the fight. Their parkas were flapping about their knees, and they ran lightly. Clearly they were men of the North. "Get your man and get him quick," Mart yelled, "then tackle the others. We can lick 'em!"

Sazonovich was within reach now, so Mart did not see the two strip off their parkas. He did not see the shaggy old head of Beaver Dupree, nor the white-headed man at his side. He did not hear a native suddenly exclaim, "Old Silvertip Taggart!"

Standing toe to toe, Mart was fighting the Russian in a battle that men

of the North will always talk of when they gather about oil-drum heaters on winter nights. Sometimes they stood up and slugged; again they rolled over and over in the snow. They fought through a thicket, onto the river bank, into the icy stream, and out again.

Two of Vader's men jumped William and put him out, then turned their attention to Mart's two natives. This proved a draw. One of Mart's men won, the other lost; and the second Vader man was rushing upon Mart with drawn knife, when Silvertip Taggart dropped his own opponent with a single blow and rushed to the aid of his son. The native had a knife; Silvertip his fists. With a deft kick of his moccasined foot, he disarmed the man, then smashed the hateful face with his left hand. He made sure that the native was out, for the time being, by kicking him in the stomach with the heel of his moccasin.

Mart was smashing blows, with both his right and left hands, against the tottering Russian's jaw. The great knees sagged; the huge head snapped backward with each blow, until it seemed as if the back of the head must touch the neck. Then Sazonovich fell backward with such force that his feet left the ground. Mart turned to see who had helped him. His eyes fairly popped out in his surprise. "Father!" he cried.

Silvertip and Silvertip's Cub hugged each other shamelessly. "They told me that you were dead," Mart cried. "Vader told me that. And I had promised not to say a word about how things were going, so we were not writing. Beaver Dupree, I figured, was keeping it from me. Say, how did you get into this?"

"Boy," roared Silvertip, "I tried to keep out of it. I swore that I'd leave it all to my cub, but, as soon as I got better and saw what was going on, I knew that you'd need help and I couldn't keep out of it. What a man you are, Mart, what a man!" Silvertip backed his cub up and looked him over.

But, in the midst of the reunion, a warning cry came from Beaver Dupree. Sazonovich had taken advantage of the unexpected chance and had run to a cabin near the river bank. He jerked the door open, then emerged, holding Gloria Vance in his arms. With the girl as a shield, he raced to the canoe and leaped aboard. The swift current did the rest and carried him with increasing speed from the scene.

Mart ran for the only canoe in sight but, when he was fifty yards away, one of Vader's natives leaped from the ground and shoved the canoe into the river beyond reach. It started downstream, drifting sideways.

Mart's punch sent the native unconscious into the stream from which Mart promptly dragged him. "I've a canoe cached a mile down," he shouted, "I'll catch him."

"Take your pistol along!" Silvertip suggested.

"No. I might hit Gloria. That's why he's got her beside him." And Mart Taggart was off on the run, a badly-battered giant in pursuit of another giant still more badly battered.

CHAPTER XX.

RETRIBUTION.

BEN MOWICH did not know himself as he slipped into the cabin. He did not believe that he possessed the courage to carry out his plan. He was not the Ben Mowich any one knew, but a throwback of five thousand years, with the courage that went with it.

Vader whirled at the soft footfall. He was not expecting trouble, but he did not like men to slip up behind him, particularly as there was so much in

his life to account for. "Mowich!" he snarled.

"Mowich!" Ben kicked the door shut as he answered. "Once you put me in a dark room. Once! With Ivan! Now you are in a dark room with Ben. You pay! You make Ben go into village and give babies throat trouble. Some die! Now you pay!"

Vader's hand went for his gun, but Ben Mowich was quicker. He bounded like a panther; the knife gleamed and descended. The weapon crashed to the floor and Ben leaped back. The room was dark, but Ben flung a blanket over the window and it was darker. "Now, Vader, go for your knife. Always you make me use your weapons, now you use mine," he directed the other.

The whites of his eyes seemed to gleam in the gloom of the cabin. Vader went for his knife; and there was a snarl of fear from the cornered cur, as he rushed Ben Mowich.

Silvertip Taggart heard the cry of a man in terror the moment that Mart left the scene. There had been so much excitement that he had forgotten the two men he had seen enter the cabin—one following the other. Now, with Beaver Dupree, he ran and shook the door. It was barred from within, and he knew that nothing short of an ax could break through.

Again came the cry that chilled the blood. The blanket fell from the window, as Silvertip picked up a stick to smash the glass. There was only a heavy sigh from within, then a falling body, then silence.

The bar against the door rattled and fell to the floor. The door opened an inch at a time, then Ben Mowich staggered into view. He fell face downward and, as Silvertip Taggart bent low to render first aid, Ben's lips muttered, "No more, Vader make people do things, no more. No more!"

"Retribution!" exclaimed Silvertip, "it always follows, sometimes swiftly, sometimes slowly, but always."

And this day retribution rode on swift wings.

Mart Taggart's pursuit of Sazonovich was somewhat delayed, but he began to overhaul the heavily laden canoe the instant that he was able to take the water. In a much lighter craft, he had the advantage in speed.

As he passed Dead Man's Island, the other canoe was just ahead. The Russian glanced back, then increased his pace. There seemed to be no limit to his reserve force. Gloria was sitting just ahead, but within reach of Sazonovich's right hand. She could not offer any help as a blow would quickly have put her out of the fight. Instead she must sit quietly and wait.

As they rounded a bend, the roar of the glacier came to their ears. Mart could not see her suddenly grow pale and wince as if struck; but the moment that he heard the crashing ice, his mind recalled the incident on the steamer, when her horror was pathetic and she had told him that she feared the glacier and had feared it since childhood. She had expressed the belief that it was to play some terrible drama in her life.

And now they were approaching it—she a prisoner in a canoe paddled by a half-mad Russian, and Mart almost helpless to end the fight before the glacier was reached.

Only one hundred and fifty yards separated the canoes, when Sazonovich turned suddenly and fired. The bullet kicked up a jet of water close to Mart's canoe. "I've been expecting that, but there's nothing that can be done about it until he hits the rapids above the glacier. Then he'll be too busy to fire and maybe I can close in," he reflected.

But, as they struck the rapids, the Russian's heavily loaded canoe wallowed through, while Mart's lighter

craft, tossing about like a cork, kept him busy. He gained twenty-five yards, however, and, as the Russian struck water as smooth as glass but as swift as a mill race, he turned and aimed again. This time Gloria was waiting. She knocked his arm just as he fired and the bullet droned overhead. Without a word, the Russian's fist shot out and caught the girl flush on the jaw. Gun or no gun, Mart drove his canoe ahead at full speed. Twice the Russian fired and the last shot hulled the smaller craft just above the waterline. As the canoe rolled, a small stream of water spurted in. Another furious drive and Mart was within twenty yards. The roar of the glacier was now deafening; and the river, which, at this point, turned sharply and rushed against the mass, now caught both canoes and carried them forward.

The moment that Sazonovich had been awaiting had arrived. He no longer fired at Mart but, lifting the unconscious girl above his head, hurled her squarely in the path of the pursuing canoe. A cry of fury, mixed with horror, came from Mart's throat. All of his tremendous strength went into the effort to turn the canoe aside. The paddle bent, then snapped in his hands, but the force had already turned the canoe. As it swung clear, Mart reached down and caught Gloria's arm and held her above the surface.

The Russian again picked up his pistol and deliberately emptied it at the helpless man. Only his eagerness to kill saved Mart. He crouched, then worked his way to the center of the frail craft. It was now a matter of balance. He slowly but surely dragged the girl over the side, while he kept his own weight on the opposite side to maintain an even keel. It was rough treatment for Gloria, but rougher was to follow. He dropped her, a sodden, almost lifeless, icy mass, and caught up another paddle.

Kneeling, he drove the canoe away from the glacier with all of his strength. It was a case of seesaw for a full minute, while closer and closer loomed the glacier. It seemed like a mountain now.

In the midst of the struggle Gloria opened her eyes. A mighty block of ice was just tearing itself from the top, and the very heavens seemed to be ripped apart. Thunder boomed again and again against their eardrums; their canoe and bodies seemed to vibrate from the crash of splitting ice. Then it fell, broke into thousands of bits, and spilled over the face of the glacier like falling water. A wave lifted and rushed across the river, tossed the canoe violently, and rushed on.

The girl placed her hands over her eyes and pressed hard. They were almost under the ice now; a hundred feet from the white wall against which the river lashed itself in impotent fury. "Mart! Mart! Mart!" she cried.

And Mart Taggart continued to cheat death. His face was contorted from his effort; great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, despite the cold. Tiny streams trickled down his cheeks. Again came the thunder as another mass farther down cracked. The echo was yet rumbling in the mountains when, above all, came the cry of a huge man, the roar of an animal facing death, and knowing fear. Mart could see, as he gained inch by inch, that the heavier canoe was helpless and was actually under the ice. Even Sazonovich's tremendous strength was futile. The fur that he coveted was now taking him to his doom. Nothing could save him unless the fall of that mass was stayed; but falling ice does not stop for the will of man. Gloria had opened her eyes, despite her horror, and was gazing

with fascination. Now she closed them again, but Mart saw the end. He saw a huge block fall squarely on the canoe, saw Sazonovich hurled upward like a cork, then caught in mid-air and completely hidden by the icy cascade, before his body struck the water. Half of the canoe eddied downstream, the other half had vanished. Here and there bales of fur, Mart's fur, floated on the surface.

Mart had made it. But he was leaning over his paddle in the canoe, his lungs sobbing for air, like a collapsed oarsman after a four-mile race. The river carried them on and on, tossed them gently into a great eddy above the ice jam, and waited their will.

Mart reached forth and gripped the paddle. Slowly he drove the canoe to the shore. "Well, Gloria, we made it!" he said.

She was trembling violently from the cold and reaction. Mart produced a water-proof match box and drew forth his skinning knife. On the bank, he found dry wood and built a fire. She stood close, while her clothing steamed. Warmth drove out the chill, bit by bit, as the flames mounted. Mart stood close, except when a bale of fur appeared in the eddy, then he dashed out and reclaimed it. They were too tense to speak much, for death had been uncomfortably near for several minutes.

She looked as if she would have enjoyed the protection of his arms until her composure returned, but she remembered the girl who had passed through and stopped briefly at Dead Man's Island, Mart's fiancée. But a girl cannot have everything. Gloria's code was, find contentment with what you have. With the hundred thousand dollars, she could regain Vance Island and restock with foxes. William and Mary would be with her and, later on, her father would return from the South where he was rapidly regaining his health. The future was dark in only one quarter. It had taken Mart's absence in the Arctic, then his return, to teach her just how far the big fellow had crept into her heart.

Thoughts of William and Mary reminded her of a promise. Each was entitled, now, to five thousand dollars, wages and reward of loyalty during the lean years. With five thousand dollars in his pocket, William's thoughts might well turn to the squaw flapper and wedded bliss. That meant that one of them would have to go. Certainly William, Mary, and the former's gay young wife could never get along together.

All this ran through the girl's mind as she turned slowly about and dried her clothing. Something would surely have to be done about William. Mary, not the flapper, was the wife for him. Gloria could not handle her own romance, but she would do something about William's.

Later in the day, Silvertip Taggart, Beaver Dupree and others appeared. Silvertip assumed command as he had always done. "I'd suggest that we leave a guard over the salvaged fur, Mart, and return to Dead Man's Island. Then we will sort of organize, rest a day, and head for town. There we'll have plenty of time to dry out this fur."

"Good idea!" agreed Mart. "You had better come along with us, Gloria, and deposit that check. You'll be wanting to draw against it."

"And I think that I shall bring William and Mary if there is room," she answered, remembering her earlier thoughts. "I want to make sure of their romance which was interrupted, if not disrupted, by a second woman."

"Great!" Mart exclaimed. "Do let me help you. I always like to see things come out right. I've got a romantic streak in me, I guess."

And that hurt, though he would not have uttered a word had he known. "I shall be glad to have you help me, Mart," she said quietly.

It was back at Dead Man's Island that Mart had a brilliant idea. "Got an old fur coat you don't want?" he inquired.

"Yes, why?"

"Well, I love pretty women in furs, and somehow I seem to know just what is proper." As he spoke, he was studying Mary. "I'll want a pair of clippers, too, and several things that I can't think of right now."

"All right," she answered, puzzled.

Then Mart found William. "Say, William, you are going to town with us, of course?" he asked.

"Sure thing!"

"Good! Now run over to the village and tell that squaw chicken that you've been flirting with, farewell. But, William, take an old man's advice, and don't pop the question until you've tried a little absence treatment. Stay away from her for three or four weeks, and then you'll know your own feelings. If, at the end of that time, you are still in love, marry the girl. If not? Well, it'll be better for both of you."

William nodded. It sounded reasonable, but he knew his own mind. When he returned, he would not hesitate. He remained that afternoon and late in the evening. When he crossed over to Dead Man's Island, the others had retired for the night, except in the main cabin where Mart and his father were talking. "Got the Decaturs over a barrel," Silvertip was saying, "they wouldn't let me sue for substituting poor trade goods for our first-class stuff. So they settled out of court under my terms. I could have been harsh, but I knew that you were licking 'em, and why kick a beaten man?"

Silence, then from Mart, "Have you seen Flora Maynard lately, dad?"

"The ermine girl, eh? No, we don't get along. But, son, when you are married, I'm going to bring myself to like her. She'll never know. Well, good night."

Silvertip stood up, looked down at his son, then left him alone staring at the fire.

Mart and Mary were alone in the cabin living room. Every one had been barred, including Gloria. From Mary came giggles and protests as Mart cut her hair. "I'm not the best barber in the world, but fortunately, Mary, the wind-blown bob is stylish and I'm giving you one. There! Now don't touch your hair, but slip into these duds. When you are ready, call me. Take your time and don't get excited." Mart disappeared and waited.

The canoes were being prepared for the trip to town. William was dressed in his best, ready, and wondering just how he was going to shake Mary and marry the flapper. The thought hurt his conscience to a considerable extent. In fact, it was only since thinking over matters that he realized that he had a conscience.

Gloria came from the cabin. "I guess that we are ready," she said.

"Where's Mart and Mary?" inquired Silvertip."

"Good heavens!" gasped William at that moment. "What happened to Mary?"

Giggling happily, Mary had just emerged. The fur coat fit her nicely. There was a jaunty little hat to match, that Gloria had designed for the occasion. All of her natural beauty had been brought to the surface. In other words, Mary was a knockout.

She hardly glanced at William, but took her place in the canoe that he was to paddle. Mart grinned. "Come on, William, snap out of it. Mary is ready."

Shaking his head feebly, William shoved the canoe into the stream. As he picked up the paddle, he glanced toward the squaw flapper waving from the other shore. William returned the salutation, then looked at Mary. "Dog-gone," he muttered, "some class!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ERMINE GIRL.

SILVERTIP and Silvertip's Cub stood at the gangplank. The steamer would sail in fifteen minutes. William hurried up, "Come quick!" he exclaimed, "going to get married."

"The deuce you are," Silvertip cried. "Say, captain, hold the ship until we get back. We're going to have a bride and groom aboard."

In the little church, attended largely by natives, a small group was waiting. Mart found himself marching to the altar behind William, while Gloria was attending Mary, who was to be given in marriage by Silvertip himself. For the occasion Mary was wearing white, and she had acquired, also, a pair of white kid shoes. "Number sevens," she said proudly, "with high heels behind."

The ceremony was brief, and a moment later they were hurrying for the steamer. "This honeymoon is on me," Silvertip declared. "You keep your ten thousand—you'll need it."

The steamer gave the final blast, as they hurried up the gangplank. Mart turned and held out his hand. "Well, Gloria, good-by!"

She smiled up at him softly, calmly, for she had steeled herself for this moment. "Good-by, Mart and," with a catch in her voice, "good luck!"

And so Mart Taggart sailed south to his ermine girl, with Gloria's good luck ringing in his ears. He knew that she meant it, for she was always sincere.

The steamer seemed to crawl on her trip south, but Mart did not care, though he wondered why.

There was a little group on the dock waiting, though the hour was two in the morning. And Flora, beautiful, soft, ermine, was waiting. She smiled up and Mart smiled down. He was first to bound over the gangplank. "Well, Flora, it has been long, but I am back."

His greeting seemed to be flat, he thought. There was something wrong.

"And I brought the Russian sable coat. I designed it myself and had it made up in Alaska. It's in the suit case which isn't good for it, but come on," he continued.

He climbed in behind the wheel of her car and drove her home. It was quiet. The family had retired, and there was a fire glowing in the fireplace. The setting was perfect for romance. He held the coat up while she slipped into it, and walked to a mirror. For several moments, she surveyed herself in the rich wrap, then she shook her head. "No, Mart, it is not for me. It is designed wrong, for me. You had another girl in mind, when you designed this wrap. You did not know it, but you did."

She slipped the coat off and laid it reverently on a chair, then she walked up and placed both hands on his shoulders. "Not designed for me, Mart, any more than you were designed for me. Mart, dear, I love you more than any man I ever met or, perhaps, shall meet; but we could never make a go of it.

"You return north, where your heart is. That country, which I hate because it is so cold and rough, taught me one thing, generosity. And I've never been generous, but I am going to be. So, Mart, go back to that wonderful, unselfish creature on the island, who sent me on to you, safe-guarded, when her heart must have been breaking."

Then it was Mart knew why the slowness of the steamer had not annoyed him. "Flora," he said softly, "you have changed. You are wonderful and right. I'm a dog, I guess, but——"

"Run along, Mart, hurry, she is waiting!" And Mart found himself on the steps with the sable coat thrown over his arm.

The curtains were drawn, so he could not see the ermine girl throw herself across the davenport and burst into tears. But somehow he knew that that happened, as surely as he knew that Flora would find her happiness in the scheme of things.

Three in the morning found him at the cable office, cabling:

Gloria, darling, together we made William's and Mary's romance come true. Help me make our own end happily. Shall I telegraph your father to come to our wedding?

Four o'clock!
Five o'clock!
Then six o'clock and the answer:

I am coming. MART.

THE END.

OWNER OF E. P. RANCH PLANS VISIT

SOME years ago, on the occasion of his previous visit to America, the Prince of Wales purchased a fine ranch for himself in Alberta, stocking it and improving the property under the guidance of neighboring cattlemen. If recently reported plans of the prince's are carried out, he will revisit his Canadian ranch during the coming summer, probably in August, staying there for two months or more.

According to the manager of the ranch, Professor W. L. Carlyle, the prince was disappointed at being able to spend only three weeks there on his previous visit, and has therefore arranged for a longer stay the next time. The ranch is situated near High River, Alberta, and is a model establishment of its kind.

INDIANS HELPED THROUGH WINTER

IN order to assist them through the winter, the Indians of the Colville reservation, in the State of Washington, were recently permitted to divide the sum of $42,630 among the 2,842 enrolled members of the tribe. This gave each Indian fifteen dollars. The money was derived from the sale of surplus land on the reservation.

The red men of the Fort Peck agency, in Montana, also received a share of tribal money to help them through the winter, the sum of $116,650 being divided among 2,330 members of the tribe. The money came from the Fort Peck reservation four per cent fund, which was recently reported as amounting to $476,000, in addition to $41,500 in deposit in the United States treasury. This payment gave each Indian fifty dollars to help with the agricultural activities during the winter months.

Mule Managed

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Horses for Alibis," etc.

TWO heavy Concord coaches, a straining six-mule hitch to each, toiled up the Squaw Pass trail.

"'Tain't fair to the mules to lay no whip on 'em on a grade like this, when they're doin' all they kin!" objected the white-whiskered, wrinkled-face "Pappy" Stewart, handling the ribbons on the second coach. "I'm a strong believer in kindness payin' big dividends, 'Brute' Pollard, an' I ain't afraid to tell that to yuh, tho' I know that that ain't yuhr gospel!"

"Yuh're tootin' right, that ain't my gospel!" snorted Pappy's companion on the driver's seat, a big, husky giant whom all the Gunsight Stage Company hands hailed as Brute Pollard. "I'm agin' fondlin' an' softenin' these mule critters—I say give 'em trouble an' make 'em jump inter the collars—how else is a gent to maintain schedules on this line ef he don't?"

Pappy whistled softly to his leaders.

"Waal," he said reflectively, "I dunno. My gospel is kindness an' at that, I ain't draggin' my coach in late on any schedules. I got as clean a record as any driver on the line, Brute, an' yuh knows it. An' I ain't wore out a whip in eighteen years o' mule skinnin', nuther! Be sure to bear that in mind!"

The other man on the driver's seat grunted.

"I dunno how yuh do it," Pollard admitted grudgingly. "But I gotta use the lash an' plenty o' it, or I'd never git nowheres. Seems to me the mules are gettin' poorer an' poorer an' lazier. Like as not it's such sentimental old fools as yuh, Pappy, who is softenin' an' spoilin' the stock o' the Gunsight Stage Company!"

"Ugh!" said Pappy angrily.

It was not often that they rode together, these two extremes, the kindly old man, who called each mule by name soothingly, and the big, black-browed devil whose only language was a string

of curses, punctuated with the crack of the black snake.

"Touch that leader thar, Pappy!" cried Brute nervously, as the second coach steadily fell behind the first one, on the upgrade. "He's sleepin' on yuh. If I had a rock, I'd fix them. Pap, give me that whip just a minnit."

Pappy Stewart's face went white.

"Mind yuhr business, Brute," he snapped hotly. "I'm drivin' this layout. And yuh ain't goin' to throw no rocks nor crack no whip on this hitch while I'm handlin' the ribbons. Do yuh git me, Brute?"

The other man laughed in a nasty manner.

"Oh, suit yuhrself, Santa Claus!" he snickered. "I don't give a whoop when we git inter Gunsight. But I'd hate to have that fust coach, full up as is with company officials, beat me by a hour inter town, when it's a special on no runnin' time, an' yuh're drivin' a regular on schedule!"

"I'll be thar on time with six mules in good condition," said Pappy gruffly. "An' now yuh leave me take care o' these mules. Yuh take care o' what yuh're here to take care o', see?"

Brute Pollard glanced at the iron-bound chest that rested under his feet. He held his rifle between his knees.

"All right, Santa Claus!" he said derisively, "wake me up when we git inter Gunsight, ef we ever do!"

Brute Pollard then pretended to drop off to sleep, which was a very unethical thing for a man in his position to do. Although a regular Gunsight Lines stage driver, he was "deadheading" into Gunsight with Pappy this trip as a special guard for a very special shipment of currency to the Gunsight State Bank, which, rumor had it, was the envy of a number of road agents who might be planning to lift the loot at any turn in the road. It was only chance that a "special" stage, containing the officials of the stage company, was just ahead. The officials were returning from an inspection trip to Grand Lake. Their coach was piloted by Carl Wilmot, as clever a driver as there was in the State. But Carl, like Brute Pollard, did not believe in sparing the mules.

"I'll beat the regular stage inter Gunsight an' show up that ol' grandmamma, Pappy," mused Carl, as the two stages crawled up the Squaw Pass grade. "I started, after he did, but I'll put my critters through in their collars!"

Pappy, sitting silent, guessed what Wilmot was trying to do. It was very evident. The distance between Wilmot's coach and Pappy's was steadily increasing. That meant but one thing. Carl was using plenty of persuasion on his mules. If Brute Pollard had his way, Pappy would be cussing and cracking his whip, too, but Pappy wasn't taking orders from Brute. It was too bad, he thought, that each driver didn't have his regular teams each trip. As it was, the drivers simply took what animals the stable boss hitched for them. In that way, every driver got a chance at every mule. But Pappy knew them all by name and they all knew him.

"Come along thar, Blackie!" cried Pappy to the leader, who was a bit slow.

The leader responded to the kind voice.

"Ha-ha!" exploded Pollard. "They do mind, don't they?"

"Yuh, Kas—an' yuh, Poss!" called Stewart to his heavy wheelers, and they responded. The second coach began to creep up on the first one, and Carl Wilmot looked back.

"Gainin' on me," he grumbled, "but he'll stop, top o' the hill, to let the critters get their breath. Sure he will, an' I'll spin my babies along so fast that we'll be strikin' sparks out o' the road. I'll beat him plenty inter Gunsight!"

"See here, Pappy," said Brute Pollard uneasily, "I know this lead

team yuh got to-day. They're grandstanders ef thar ever was grandstanders, and they ain't pullin'. Give 'em the whip, like I do!"

"Never mind worryin'," said Pappy Stewart.

"Wait until I git that team in front o' me one o' these bright days," threatened Brute with a frown, "I'll push 'em through their collars, tracin' whip designs on their flanks. It makes me sore to see 'em fool yuh like this, Pappy!"

"Oh, don't worry over me none," said Pappy.

At the top of the hill, Carl Wilmot let out an Apache whoop and swung his long whip high, wide, and handsome, as the saying goes. His six black mules leaped forward as though the crack of Doom had sounded at their heels. Into the collars they went, tightening the traces. Down the grade they whirled, the big "special" coach spinning after them. Carl's brakes began to screech as he applied a heavy boot. But he looked around, a challenging grin on his face. And he laughed aloud as he saw Pappy, ignoring the invitation to race, calmly pull up his mules on the very top of the grade.

"Now what?" demanded Brute Pollard.

"Breathin' spell," explained Pappy wearily, relaxing comfortably, "breathin' spell, Brute. Jus' take a deep whiff o' that mountain air."

The driver-guard looked his astonishment.

"Yuh mean that yuh're stoppin' here to let these lazy mule critters rest, while Carl Wilmot's razzin' his six down the road as fast as he kin travel? Is that what yuh mean?" he asked.

Pappy looked Brute straight in the eyes.

"I always rest my team top o' the grade!" he said.

Brute seemed stunned for a moment. Then, hugging his uptilted rifle between his two knees, he broke out into a huge laugh that echoed all along the pass. He clapped his hands together as though he were applauding some vaudeville act that was screamingly funny. He roared and clapped, and roared and clapped, until Pappy got red in the face and the passengers stuck their heads out of the coach to see what all the mirth was over. They quickly ducked back in, however, and Pappy's face lost its flush.

"Hands up, yuh bums!" came the shout.

Three men, masks over the lower portion of their faces, had stepped from the scrub oak thickets. One was at the head of the team, a rifle ready. The second had Pappy and Brute covered. The third man, seemingly the leader, was stepping briskly toward the coach to order its occupants out.

"What's this?" cried Brute, opening his eyes from his spasm of merriment to discover himself covered by a rifle. He stared for a fraction of a moment then raised his hands.

"No noise!" cried a bandit, glancing down the road.

Wilmot's stage had swung out of sight. But it was plain that the bandits wanted no sound of the holdup to reach that speeding first stage; and then, Pappy remembered, two of the company's minor officials in that coach were reckoned as dead shots. Pappy grunted. He looked sideways at Brute who was stretching his arms out of place to obey the bandits' orders. Then craftily, Pappy glanced at Brute's rifle, still between the guard's knees. Carefully Pappy reached over with one foot.

Bang! went the rifle.

Instantly one of the bandits, the man at the head of the lead team, brought up his gun.

"Stop it!" whooped the leader, motioning him, "no more shootin'. That other stage'll be back in a jiffy. No

time to lose now! Yuh hombres think that yuh're smart, don't yuh, guard—kickin' off that gun!"

"I didn't!" protested the white-faced Brute.

"That chest!" ordered the leader, paying no more attention to the frightened passengers. Pull it out! Take that guard's rifle, too. That's it, easy, easy!"

The leader and the bandit, who had first covered Pappy and Brute, eased the chest down off the stage. The third man, with gun ready, still stood at the head of the lead team. The mules were standing quietly, however, although they had fidgeted at the report of the rifle. The bandits, getting the chest off the road and into the thicket of scrub oak, came back, casting smiling glances down the road whence Carl Wilmot's coach had vanished.

"Ha!" said the leader of the robbers. "Yuh're stunt didn't work, Mr. Guard, after all; an' now, seein' they didn't hear yuh an' ain't comin' back fer to help yuh, we'll teach yuh to monkey with us—eh, boys?"

"Shoot him through the noodle!" said the man at the lead team.

"Mules," said the bandit leader, grinning evilly. "Mules sometimes are great runners, boys. Wasn't it the ol' fellers in Rome that used to tie folks to mules' tails an' kill 'em that way, wasn't it? An' it's quiet, too!"

"I never was thar," said the second bandit.

"Off that seat, yuh guard!" howled the bandit leader angrily, "I'll learn yuh smart tricks. Jones, unhitch that team o' leaders. I'll show this guard a smart trick or two!"

Down went Brute, then, very obediently.

"I'm goin' to hitch that team o' mules to yuh," said the bandit leader briskly. "An' we'll see how far yuh kin be drug by two mules as are in a hurry to leave. Here, Jones!"

"Comin' up!" said Jones, bringing back the lead team.

"See here," spoke up Pappy Stewart, realizing suddenly that he was about to witness what must be the end of his fellow driver, Brute Pollard, "that bird ain't to blame fer that shot. I kicked his rifle."

"Oh, yuh!" said the leader sullenly.

"Yes," said Pappy, very truthfully; and then he added, not so truthfully, but hopefully: "I did it accidentallike!"

"Ho!" said the bandit, and he reached up and dragged Pappy bodily from the stage. "Jones, fetch me that team o' swing critters!"

"For the love o' Mike!" exploded Pappy.

"We'd shoot yuh through yuhr thick skulls an' git it over with, ef we wasn't dislikin' to make so much noise," said the bandit. "Now we'll see how yuh two kin drive mules!"

Brute was already tied up, hands and feet. After he had been trussed up, the second bandit calmly pushed him over, and Brute sprawled in the road. Another piece of rope, from the stage, was attached to Brute's neck, and the bandit then started to tie it to the traces of the lead mules team when the bandit chieftain called a halt.

"This ain't no hangin' bee," he said tersely. "Chokin' is too good fer these hombres; put that rope around that bird's middle!"

In a minute, it seemed, Pappy was well tied, and he was anchored to the swing team, right behind the luckless Brute and his leaders. It was a bad situation. If Brute's team didn't run fast enough, when the race started, Pappy's swing team would run over him; while, on the other hand the faster the lead team ran the faster the swingers would follow, and the briefer would be Pappy's and Brute's time among the living. It would take only a short distance over the rocky mountain road, behind the sharp heels of frightened

stage mules, to snuff out two human lives. Pappy groaned and mumbled words that sounded like a prayer of some sort; but Brute Pollard cursed and screamed frightfully. The bandit leader had enough of that. He motioned to his man, Jones.

"Whoop-la!" cried Jones, smacking the near mule with the butt of his rifle. The mule jumped a yard, dragging its teammate with it. And then the lead team was off at a gallop, with the unfortunate Brute Pollard bouncing along at their heels, raising a tremendous dust and in momentary danger of a crushed skull.

"Whoa!" cried Brute, but the black leaders seemed not to hear his cries at all. If they did hear him, they must have recognized his voice as that of the hated Brute, and they increased their speed.

"Please, fellers!" begged Pappy hopelessly.

"Yuh next!" ordered the bandit leader; and he himself clipped off his hat and slapped the near swing mule. It jumped, and it's mate went with it.

"Whoa!" screamed Pappy wildly, as he felt the skin being ripped off his neck and shoulders. "Whoa, Horace! Whoa, Harry! Whoa, boys!"

"Look," cried the bandit, named Jones, pointing excitedly, "something in the bushes, fellers."

"Come on!" cried the leader.

The bandits broke for the scrub oak thicket, whence they had carried the money chest, and where their horses waited them. But, before they had covered half the intervening distance, rifles cracked from the hillside above them. The stage passengers yelled. The bandit leader spun like a crazy top and then collapsed. The other two outlaws wheeled at right angles as more shots came, but, in a minute, they lifted their hands in token of surrender. Half a dozen armed men were coming down the hill, on foot, guns alert.

"Whoa!" came an agonized shout in the lull that followed the fusillade, and the men on the hill glanced down the road to see a shivering team of mules standing stock still, quivering in every muscle, but standing, nevertheless.

"Good grief!" cried one of the newcomers and he ran for the team, but he was smart enough to approach it slowly, speaking gently to the frightened animals. He got his hands on their bridles, and then he looked down at the bundle that they had dragged. It was Pappy Stewart, dusty, dirty, bloody, his clothes torn, but with sparkling eyes and a satisfied grin on his withered lips.

"They're good mules, Horace an' Harry are," said Pappy, as other men arrived and helped him to his feet and unbound his ties. "I spoke to 'em an' they minded, though they was sure scared an' I could o' stopped 'em sooner, too, ef it hadn't been fer that shootin'—that kinda worried them a little."

"It was us shootin', Pappy," said Dave Brofman, manager of the Gunsight Stage Company, patting the old man's shoulder. "We heard a shot, up thar in the fust coach, even though Wilmot was hollerin' to beat everything an' crackin' his whip over his mules. We made him stop. We figgered that it might be a stick-up. We got out, an' circled back over the hill, surprisin' yuhr bandits just in time. We got one, sure enough, I reckon, an' the others gave up. Was it Brute who fired that one shot we heard; an' by the way, whar is Brute, anyhow?"

"I fired the shot," said Pappy slowly. "I thought that it was the right thing to do, sir, but pore ol' Brute——"

"Whar is Brute?" persisted Brofman excitedly, "an' whar is yuhr lead team, Pappy?"

"I beg pardon, sir," said Carl Wilmot, coming up the road on foot. "I got Brute down in my coach, sir. He's

all done up, 'bout dead, but I guess that he's tough enough to pull through. Yuh see, boss, after yuh guys got out an' went over the hill, I heard hoofs thuddin' down the road. I got my Winchester, hopin' to drill a few bandits. But, no, it was Pappy's lead team, draggin' Brute at their heels. I stopped 'em—cut Brute loose. He woke up long enough to say that he'd yelled 'whoa' at 'em an' cussed 'em until he passed out, an' they wouldn't stop. I have him spread out in my coach, sir!"

The news of Brute's rescue seemed to revive Pappy.

"What did I tell yuh all!" he cackled happily, fixing his gaze on Wilmot; "kindness pays big dividends, I claim! Me an' Brute started off hand in hand, almost, in the same kind of fatal race, bein' drug behind two teams o' scared mules. But my mules knowed me, an', waal, sort o' cared fer me, I guess. They stopped just as soon as they could, considerin' how badly frightened they was; they drug me a hundred feet. But how far down the road did yuh stop that lead team, Wilmot?"

"About a quarter o' a mile," said Wilmot.

"Huh!" snorted Pappy, throwing out his chest proudly, "I'm drugged a hundred feet by the swing team, an' Brute is drug a quarter o' a mile by the lead team an' would be still goin', too, ef it wasn't fer Wilmot. I tell yuh, gentlemen, kindness, particularly to mules, pays big dividends!"

"Amen!" said Wilmot, nodding his head gravely.

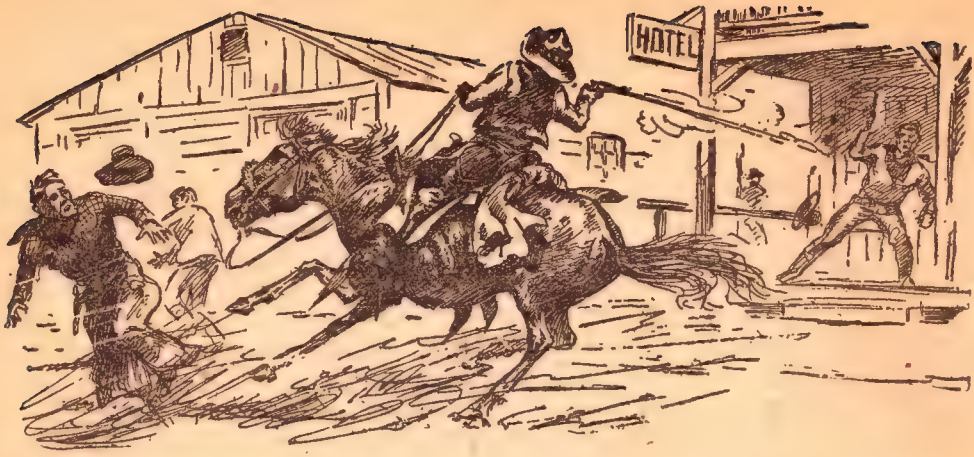
REDUCING MONTANA BUFFALO HERD

IN order to reduce surplus stock on the buffalo range at Moiese, Montana, a number of the animals were slaughtered during the winter, and the meat was shipped to sportsmen's clubs and other organizations in principal cities of the East, where it is highly regarded and in great demand. Unless some of the buffalo are killed each year, the range is in danger of becoming overgrazed, as these animals breed rapidly. At last reports this range had four hundred and fifty head of buffalo. There are also four hundred elk and a number of deer. In 1925, the elk on the reservation were reduced by shipping a large number of them to be placed in a park in Massachusetts.

PLANE CRASHES INTO OREGON MOUNTAIN

WHILE flying low in a heavy fog, a few weeks ago, Patrick Patterson, an air-mail pilot, crashed his machine into the face of Mount Ashland, near Medford, Oregon, wrecking the plane and injuring himself badly. His left hip was broken, his left leg crushed, and his right hand was severely burned through coming in contact with the exhaust pipe.

On seeing the accident, woodcutters who were some two hundred yards away, rushed to the rescue of the pilot and got him from the wreckage of his air craft. They then put him on a sled and hauled him two miles to the highway, where an ambulance was summoned to convey him to a hospital in Medford.



Smiling Charlie

By Max Brand

Author of "The Canyon Coward," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

COLONEL STOCKTON, virtual owner of the whole Sierra Blanca region, has a beautiful daughter, Olivia, with whom the Baron Wakeness is in love. The Colonel disapproves of the Baron, and chooses Billy Jacks, the raconteur of the story, to be one of his right-hand men and a member of his household, because Jacks' remarkable shooting shows up the Baron as a relatively poor marksman. Meantime, the whole region has been stirred by the presence of an elusive horse thief and philanderer, known as Smiling Charlie. All sorts of traps are laid for him—especially by the fathers of girls, who have fallen hopelessly in love with him on account of his handsome appearance. The Colonel offered Charlie immunity from punishment if he would surrender himself to him. When Charlie is brought before him, it develops that his reason for summoning him was to arouse Olivia's interest in some man other than the Baron. Charlie is then made an honored member of the Colonel's household, although he refuses to play a part in breaking Olivia's engagement, unless he has visual proof that the Baron is a rotter. He gets this proof in a race in which the Colonel has put up ten thousand dollars on Charlie's horse. The Baron whipped his horse, but Charlie won the race. The Baron, the Colonel, and Billy Jacks, while out riding, discovered Charlie kissing Olivia, who confessed to the Baron that she was more than interested in Charlie. Olivia's maid, Betty, fainted with shock upon hearing of the episode.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ONLY INNOCENT.

I TOOK a look at that note and then at Dick.

"Why didn't Charlie wait to tell me what he wanted to say?" I asked him.

"I dunno," says Dick. "Charlie's mind ain't mine. There you are!"

Then he went off and left me with the note.

And I was sort of glad afterward that nobody was there to see my face as I read it, because it said:

Billy, I didn't realize that there was so much snake in you. As for the harm that I've done you, I've been half sorry about it. But now I'm glad.

As for the further harm that I intend to do you, you can make up your mind that it will not be long before I come on your trail. And when I come, have your guns ready, because I intend to kill you, Jacks, as sure as fate.

CHARLES LAMB.

Yes, that was serious. Nobody leaves a note threatening to kill a man, unless he's pretty heated up. And, when you come to think of it, nobody was as little likely to get actually heated up as this same Smiling Charlie was.

He meant business; but I wouldn't

have him hanged for killing me, just because he'd been man enough to warn me of what he intended to do. I touched a match to that note and, when I'd watched the black cinder of the paper float away into the air, I turned around and walked for the Colonel's.

Things were piling up with interest. I had told Charlie that one day I would get him. Now he had turned around and told me the same thing. So, all around, it looked like business.

The Colonel was ready to see me right off. And we sat in the library, with the gold of the western sun floating in through the long windows and making everything look shadowy and unreal inside of the house.

He says, "The devil is up, my friend. The devil is actually up and walking the earth, and he seems to have taken a most special interest in Stockton House. What I'm wondering just now is what you know of all of his doings?"

"I only know," said I, "that Charlie Lamb seems to have disappeared."

"You should know more than that about him," said the Colonel. "The fact is that he is very hot against you, Jacks."

"I gathered that, too," said I.

"However," said the Colonel, "you needn't worry about him, because I've given orders to have him watched out of the valley. He's being accompanied by six good men to the first pass; and, after he's seen through that, I don't think that he'll be able to jump back over the fence into our garden!"

He made a pause, and knocked the ashes off his cigar.

"Very odd," said the Colonel, "how deeply you've become involved in this affair. But I think that there is something more for you to do with it. I am going to open my heart to you, Jacks. The fact is that my daughter gave Master Lamb his marching orders."

"Miss Olivia!" I cried.

"Yes, yes," said he, and his eyes glittered, so that you could see that he was tremendously satisfied.

He went on, "When she heard what had happened at the same time that he was paying such attention to her, she was naturally sickened, and she asked me to send for him. I don't think that the scoundrel will ever wish to see her face again. Not after what she had to say to him! In the meantime, he has done his damage, and poor Baron Wakeness is on the way back to England at the present moment!"

I looked down at the floor. Of course, I could see through this pose on the part of the Colonel.

And, as a matter of fact, while he talked I was wondering how any man could be so devilish clever as he had turned out to be. In the first place, he had gotten rid of the baron; and in the second place, he had gotten rid of the tool which he had used to discard the baron. All down the list, he was the winner; and yet he had done it so neatly that only Charlie Lamb knew what he had really had in mind.

And Charlie Lamb was out of the problem now, so it seemed. What I knew was chiefly by the accident of having listened at the window, when the Colonel was talking with Charlie. The Colonel never guessed that I knew the combination as well as Charlie did. Perhaps he wouldn't have been talking so freely if that had been the case.

"Betty, you'll be glad to know," says the Colonel, "has recovered. She seems to be a girl with a great deal of mental muscle. And she soon digested the shock. You'll be pleased to know that."

"Yes, sir," said I. "Of course, I'm very glad to know that."

"There remains, however, the problem of my daughter. You see that I talk to you not as an employee, but as a friend whose advice I need. Olivia is a girl whose heart is really not often

deeply moved. It is moved now. She is badly broken up; and, as long as this man is above ground, I'm afraid that she will never fix her mind on the life that lies ahead of her. She may always be looking back to him with regrets. He's such a worthless, romantic devil, you know. The very type to attract the eye of a girl. But you've had the bitter proofs of that, yourself!" the Colonel continued.

I didn't quite follow that. But what I did follow was that the Colonel was indirectly angling for me to take a hand in this matter and try to remove Charlie Lamb. Remove him how? Why, with a bullet, perhaps. I suppose that the Colonel really didn't care how.

"As a matter of fact, sir," says I, "in due time, me and Charlie Lamb has got to meet; and, when we meet, one of us will die!"

"If he should kill you, I think that I could see to it that he hung for it," said the Colonel. "But, as a matter of fact, there is no danger of that. I know him, and I know you. And, of the two, you are the more capable fighting man, my lad, simply because you are the less confident."

Very neat, but there was something else revealed.

It hardly mattered to the Colonel. Let me kill Charlie, and there would be an end of Charlie Lamb. Or let Charlie kill me and be hanged for it. In either case, an end to Charlie Lamb!

You see how it worked out? Like one of those problems in the newspapers. You can't see how it fits together, until the last piece is in place!

I admired the Colonel a bit. But more than ever, I felt that he was a tiger.

"I am glad to see," went on the Colonel, "that you are leaving it to time to bring you and Charlie together. Certainly, I should hate to see you fight it out. But, at the same time, some men are so hasty when they have been injured as he has injured you."

"Injured me?" says I, bewildered.

"Why, man, is it possible that you don't know? I thought that you understood and were being a philosopher about it!" the Colonel said.

I stood up, my brain reeling.

"Will you tell me in a few short words?" I asked.

"Tell you? I don't like the responsibility, because, if you're ready to kill him without knowing this, what will you be afterwards?" was the Colonel's answer.

I set my teeth.

"Sir," says I, "you're driving in the spur pretty deep!"

"Poor lad," says the Colonel. "Heaven knows that I don't wish to torment you. But I don't know that the knowledge would be wise to place in your hands."

He got up and walked the room. I followed him, with my eyes still weak with the thing that I was guessing.

Suddenly he stopped on the far side of the room and pointed.

It was a big room that went straight through the house; and the windows on the other side looked into the garden, where the willows were.

"There she is now," said the Colonel. "She is looking cheerful and strong enough. Why don't you go and ask her yourself?"

I looked out of the window, and there were Betty and Miss Olivia.

"Miss Olivia?" I said.

"My daughter? No, no, poor fellow! I mean Betty, of course. Your Betty," the Colonel said.

Well, that was enough to strike me blind; and the light didn't come back across my eyes until I was out there in the garden and saw the dresses of the two girls, flashing between the leaves of the trees ahead of me.

Then I stopped a minute and tried

to pull myself together. It didn't seem possible! I couldn't believe what the Colonel had made me guess.

There was a scream from Betty.

"Miss Olivia! Help! He's come to kill me!"

"Hush, Betty! Hush!" said Miss Olivia. "He'll not touch you, nor offer to. Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid, Betty!"

Well, my eyes cleared a little after that and, first of all, I could see Miss Olivia. It seemed to me that she was very pale and set in her expression. But is wasn't on account of me that she looked older and so sick.

And, after that, I could see Betty, as she clung to Miss Olivia and trembled and looked as though I was a hawk and she a chicken getting under the wing of its mother.

What had she done?

Well, I only knew beforehand that there was a curse over Stockton House.

I took off my hat, not out of politeness, but to rub the perspiration off of my forehead. And I blinked at the pair of them.

"I've come to find out," says I. "Betty, talk up!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

BETTY'S WORK.

NOW, when I had a good look at Betty, I could see that there was something pretty bad the matter with her.

She didn't look at me; but she looked straight back at Miss Olivia, as if to say, "Help me! Keep him away from me!"

And Miss Olivia put an arm halfway round her and said, "Billy Jacks, you know so much already that you can know more; and I think that it's your right to know this."

"No, no!" says Betty, in a half scream. "He'll kill me, if he knows!"

"He must know, and he must know now," said Miss Olivia. "I think that I understand Billy Jacks better than you do, and I know there is nothing vicious about him."

She got that far, when Betty, with a wail, scooted away and headed for the house.

Miss Olivia looked after her; and I was half of a mind to run after that girl and bring her back by force, but I didn't. I just waited for the bad news to happen.

And Miss Olivia says pretty soon, "This isn't pleasant to tell you. But I know that you'll forgive me for having to tell you such unlucky tidings. It seems that Charles Lamb was simply a lying and hypocritical scoundrel. You know that he was pretending to be greatly interested in me!"

She brought out the words with a little effort, but she didn't wince in spite of the pain that the speech must have given her. She went right on, and I admired her a lot for it.

"Yes," says I, "I know."

"But all the while that he was making that pretense, he was making outright and violent love to another person, Billy Jacks. I suppose that you can guess who?" she asked.

Then it came crash in my mind; that voice that I had heard from the girl who had been sitting with her head on the shoulder of Smiling Charlie the other evening! It came thudding home like a bullet into me. It was Betty!

"Betty!" says I. "It was Betty!"

And Miss Olivia nodded.

"It was Betty!" says I, feeling the world turn black in front of me.

I began to turn away from her but, all at once, she ran after me and touched my shoulder.

"Don't imagine too much," she began.

I brushed her hand away.

There was nothing that mattered to me, then. Not even the hand of Miss

Olivia touching me! I just brushed her away, and I headed straightway out of the garden. I thought that she called once behind me. But I didn't turn back to make sure.

I was walking through a queer sort of a darkness, and there wasn't much that I was able to take in.

I went up to my room, where I got together my blanket roll. Then I went on out to the stable and got hold of my bay and put the saddle on him. Then, from the gun room, I picked out my rifle. I had two pairs of Colts, one for the holster of the saddle, and one for the hips. I had chosen those guns with a lot of care. I had used them a lot. And I knew that they were perfect. But now, as I set my hands on them, the black cloud lifted off me; and everything became as clear as day to me.

Outside, I mounted the bay, when old Albemarle walked up.

"You ought not to ride the bay for a week," says he. "You've been working him down too much. He needs to flesh up a little."

"Listen to me," says I, riding the bay right up to him and sitting the saddle with my shadow in his face. "Listen to me, because I'm going to give you some good advice. You got a lot of low hounds on this place that'll listen to your yapping. But don't you ever open your mouth to me again and give me advice, because I'm a grown man, Albemarle. And if you was twenty years younger, I'd fix you so's you'd remember my words a good deal better!"

Well, Albemarle was a sort of mean old beggar, in a good many ways, and he wasn't exactly easy in his speech, sometimes; but still, there was no call for talking to him that way. No excuse at all! He'd always been partial to me and done a lot for me and my ponies. But here I was ripping into him without any mercy.

Well, I turned around and walked the bay out into the open and jogged him down the road.

I sort of hated to leave the place, though, because there were a lot more gents around there that I would have liked to meet up with and tell them what I thought of them. There were a lot of nasty things that I had on the tip of my tongue all ready to fire at them; but there was something that I wanted more than to talk to other men, which was just to get Smiling Charlie within the range of my rifle, or point-blank with my revolver.

The revolver would be better, I decided.

At a distance, I wouldn't be able to see his face and watch it when death hit it. And that was what I wanted. I wanted to see death catch hold of him and choke him, so that he could see me laughing as he died.

You might ask how come that I was so willing to step up to Smiling Charlie, now; I, who had always felt that he was a far better man than me at any sort of a weapon? Well, I'll tell you. The fact is that I didn't have any fear of man left in me. I would have walked up to ten fighters and talked to them like I was invisible, or their guns was loaded with wooden bullets. That was how sure I was. My nerves was like steel.

I could see the truth about all the men that I had ever known, it seemed to me; and, also, it seemed as though there was a line drawn straight from the muzzle of my gun to anything that I wanted to shoot at.

As I jogged my horse down the lane, I pulled out a gun and let loose three shots; and three strands of the wire fence snapped with a *ping!*

As I went on, the horses in that field came out through the gap that I had made and wandered off down the lane at a gallop. And that pleased me a good deal, too. Yes, anything that

would make trouble for other men would please me a whole lot. The more pain and misery that I could bring into the world, the better I was satisfied.

Because, no matter what I did to other folks, there was nothing that I could do to Betty.

No, she sat back there in Stockton House and grieved about nothing, except maybe that Smiling Charlie had been run out of the valley and couldn't sit beside her any more in the evenings and sing her his lying songs!

CHAPTER XXXII.

TERRIFYING THE TRAIL.

I WENT along into town, at last. There I stepped into the livery stable, and ordered the boss to have the bay rubbed down and walked to cool him off, and then to have a feed of good clean oats thrown into him.

He was a fat old chap, that boss. He was always sitting along beside the front door of the stable, with his chair all comfortable, tilted back against the wall. Most usually he was slicing away at a stick with a sharp knife.

He pushed the hat back from his forehead.

"Matter of fact, Billy," says he, "there ain't a soul here to walk your horse and cool him off."

I turned around and looked at him. And it seemed to me that clearer than the three days' whiskers on his face, I could see his greasy, lazy soul.

I pointed a finger at him.

"I'm gunna be back here inside of an hour," says I "and you see that all of those things are done, and done right!"

Well, he jumped as though I'd pointed a gun at him instead of a finger.

His hat tumbled off, but he didn't pay any attention to that; he just threw me a scared look as though I'd sent a bullet through him, or was about to, grabbed the reins, and led the bay inside. And all the way, he was walling his eyes back at me as though he expected me to open fire on him.

It made me laugh again, with my lips stiff as iron; and I went on down the street, with my nerves on edge and my jaws set.

I went to the sheriff's office; and there Steve Ross jumped up and came to meet me.

"Why, Billy," says he, "you've got to be a stranger in here. I have been missing you a lot!"

"Why?" says I. "Have you had some sort of use for me? Something that you wanted to get out of me?"

He give me a weird look. Him and me had always gotten along fine. And he knew that when the Colonel had asked me my opinion of him, I had given him a fine recommendation, which was worth a couple of more terms of office to him.

"Now, Billy," he said, "what's happened? What's wrong? Has somebody been telling you lies about me?"

"You know what's wrong!" says I. "I'm thinking, maybe, about the dog's work that I used to do for you. What kept you in office but the rides that I made for you and the fighting that I did for you? How many criminals did you ever bring in yourself? And yet you kept me down on pay that a dog would have starved on!"

"Heavens, Billy," said Steve, "you never once raised a kick!"

"I wouldn't help myself," says I. "I was too proud. I waited to see what generosity would get out of you, but it didn't get a thing. No, sir, I waited and I got nothing. But I dropped in here to-day to tell you that I saw through you then and I saw through you clear and clean."

He was silent, a sick-looking man. I could see that he didn't want to quarrel; and the same dull, dazed look that

I had seen in other men's faces that day, that had given me so much pleasure, came now in his.

"Now," I told him, "you can clear off all old scores!"

"I'd like to," said he, very sober, "because there was never a man that I thought more of than I've thought of you, old fellow. But tell me what I can do?"

"You don't have to be scared," I sneered at him. "It ain't your money that I want. It's just some information that you happen to have that'll be useful to me."

"Name the thing," said he. "You can have anything that I know!"

And he leaned forward a little, very eager to please.

I said, "Where is Smiling Charlie?"

"We saw him through the Crocker Pass," said the sheriff. "That's all that I know."

"You sent him through the Crocker Pass?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Were you along with him?"

"Sure, there were orders from the Colonel himself. And I took him along in person," Steve said.

It was deep dusk now. I looked out of the window at the stars, where they hung low in the sky; and I wondered whether I had better stay in town overnight, or maybe had I better get along my way.

And then I remembered suddenly, that I hadn't brought any money down with me!

Well, that rode me a good deal and bothered me a lot. But suddenly I snapped back my shoulders, and let the worry slide down off my back.

What was money to me? There was never a time when good guns wouldn't get a man all that he needed in the West!

Well, now as I write this down, it gives me a shiver. But, at that time, it didn't bother me at all, and it seemed the most natural thing that you could imagine.

After a while, I decided that I would go through the town and not stop there.

I said, "Have you no idea where Smiling Charlie would have headed after getting through the pass?"

"I got no idea," said the sheriff. "He didn't act as though he was worried much about where he should head. But I should like to know, old fellow, what happened that put the Colonel down on Charlie, so quick."

"You'll never find out from me," I snapped at him, and then walked out of the office and into the street.

I turned in the street and called back to him, "If you got any way of letting the news sift out, you might send the word beyond the Sierra Blanca, and everywhere you can, that I'm looking for Charlie Lamb, and that I would like powerful well to meet up with him, night or day. A thousand miles ain't too far for me to travel to have the pleasure of a little talk with him!"

"I'll do that," said the sheriff in an anxious voice, having followed me out onto the veranda. "Only, Billy, old fellow, you don't aim to fight with Charlie, do you?"

There was a lot of real concern in his voice. Because there was only one opinion about Smiling Charlie, and that was that he couldn't be downed by any man in the world.

I knew what they thought. And in the old days, when I had looked forward to the fight with Charlie that I had promised to myself, it used to scare me a good deal. But now it was all different and, as I was saying before, there wasn't a nerve in my body that jumped or quivered once!

I walked back through town, taking it easy; and, at the end of about an hour, I got to the stable where I found that everything had been done, just as I commanded, and the boss himself was

now polishing the bay off with a wisp of hay.

I took him without a word of thanks; and, as I was swinging into the saddle, he said, "That'll be about fifty cents, Billy, if you please!"

"I don't please!" I told him.

And I rode off down the street, hoping and praying that he would have the nerve to call some sort of an argument after me. But he was too wise to do that. He'd seen the danger signal.

I got clear of the town and headed for Crocker Pass; and never once did I let up, until I'd got through the pass. Then I saw the lights of a house winking down the slope. I headed for that house, put up the bay in the stable, and went to knock at the kitchen door. There wasn't any answer. So I just didn't wait but put my shoulder to the door, sprung the bolt, and walked in.

I was rattling at the stove, waking the fire up, when a gent came down into the doorway, half in a nightgown and half in trousers, with a rifle in his hand. I pointed a finger at him.

"Put down that gun!" says I.

He had jerked the rifle up to cover me the moment that I spoke, but then he yelped, "Billy Jacks!"

And he dropped the gun as though it was hot.

I smiled at him. I was pleased again.

"I didn't know that it was you, Billy," he whined at me.

"Get some supper started for me," I directed.

He let out a shout for his wife; and pretty soon she and a half-grown girl and the father of the family were working away, getting together a feed for me.

Says the man, "I hear that the Colonel has fired Smiling Charlie Lamb?"

"He fired Charlie, and I fired myself," I told him.

"You fired yourself!" he gasped.

He turned around, a frying pan hanging from one hand and the eggs in it threatening to slip out onto the floor.

"Yes," said I, "what about it?"

"Nothing!" says he, and put the pan back on the stove.

But, now and then, he would turn his head enough to steal a look at me; and every time that he did that, he found me watching him and smiling a little. But my smile seemed to chase the shivers up and down his spine, for he would turn back to the stove with a jerk.

That whole family began to get nervous; and, when I would speak, the whole gang would jump as though I had fired a shot.

And that contented me a pile!

Yes, sir, it was plain that the devil was up in me. Blind with hate for the world as I was, I knew that it was the devil. But I didn't care, for I felt that the devil was making me strong. And strength was what I needed to kill Charlie Lamb.

After that was done, why it didn't matter a rap what happened to me. That was my great job and, until it was finished, I could never draw a peaceful breath.

I ate my supper, finished my coffee, and turned into their best bed. And, as I went to sleep, I could hear them whispering like scared rabbits together in the room below me. And that gave me very pleasant dreams for the evening.

It was well after midnight, when I had my dinner. It was only the gray of the dawn, however, when I was in the saddle again. And I says to the scared woman in the door, "Did Charlie Lamb stop here yesterday?"

"In the evening, yes," said she.

"Which way did he head after he left here?" I demanded.

"He took the left-hand road, where the two fork, just yonder!"

So I headed down in that direction.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT THE POINT OF A GUN.

ABOUT noon of that day, I saw the smoke of a town curling up like thin clouds beyond a nest of hills; and I rode into the place an hour later. I had never been down that way before; but it was plain that they had heard about me, because the Colonel's men were all well known, not only in the Sierra Blancas, but in all the countryside around.

They stared at me, as I went by, and I heard my name a couple of times spoke out behind me. But they didn't smile, and I began to guess that queer reports had been drifting down the valley about me.

I didn't mind that. The queerer the reports, the better! Since the devil was in me, folks might as well learn about it, soon as late.

I had the bay rode down to a stagger by this time. His flanks were marked and bleeding from the spur. I thought that I'd hardly ever had to urge him before that day. But, no matter how well he traveled on that trail, he always seemed to me to be just crawling!

So I put him up in the hotel stable, and saw a boy rubbing him down and taking care of him.

I saw, from the look of him, that I wouldn't be able to get on the road again until late in the afternoon, because already I had done a day's ride, you understand? And I had done it in a mighty short time.

So I went into the hotel, sat down, and asked for lunch.

There was a little palaver, because it seemed that the lunch hour was over with and that the cook was away from the hotel. But I made them go and rustle me a plate of ham and eggs. And, while I was eating it, a gent came in. He was a tall gent with a long pair of sandy whiskers. He flapped open the vest that he was wearing to let me have a look at a big, nickle-plated badge.

He said, "You're Billy Jacks, partner?"

"What of that?" I asked him.

"Don't be ugly, Jacks," says he. "I represent the law in this town."

"I guessed that it was a rotten town before I even saw you," I told him.

He jerked up his head with fire in his eyes.

"What has gotten into you, man?" says he. "We've had reports from all along the line that you've been taking what you wanted, everywhere, and never paying. That would go very well if you were in the Colonel's service; but we also have heard over the telephone that you're no longer working for him."

"What you've heard don't interest me," says I. "What I want to know from you, deputy sheriff, or whatever you are, is if you have seen Charlie Lamb going through this here town?"

"Never mind Charlie Lamb," said he, "unless I know why you want him!"

"Unless you know? And what is it to me whether you know or don't know?" I asked him.

He banged his fist on the table.

"I won't stand for talk like that!" said he.

"You can sit for it, then," I sneered at him. "And now you get out of here. I'm a busy man. I got things on my mind that are worth thinking about, and I got no time for a long hound like you!"

His lips twitched and his eyes rolled. He was half choking, he was so crazy mad.

"I'll sit here and see that you pay for this meal," says he.

"You'll sit a long time, then," I remarked. "Girl, get me my hat, yonder!"

A freckle-faced waitress brought me

my hat. I slammed it on my head, then sat tilted back in my chair. It's a plumb good position to shoot from, when you're lying far back in a chair!

"Now," says I, "I've finished eating, and I'm going out to the stable and get my horse. What have you got to say about it?"

"You refuse to pay?" he said, grinding his teeth.

"Yes," said I, and smiled at him, with my lips having that same numb, metal feeling.

"You're actually going to make a fight of this, Billy Jacks?" he asked me.

I stood up.

"I'm tired of yapping to you about it," says I, and started straight past him.

Of course, that was easy for him; and he made a flash for a gun, but all the time I was watching him like a cat. With my left hand, I caught his wrist. With my right, I quickly jammed the muzzle of a gun up against his temple.

I never was any giant; but, under the tips of my fingers, that wrist of his felt like pulp.

And the speed of drawing those guns was nothing, because they were just like feathers in my hand.

This fellow walled up his eyes at me.

"Heavens," said he, "you'd like to murder me!"

"You're through, are you?" I snarled at him.

"Yes," he admitted. "I'm through. I got nothing against you, nothing worth a killing, Jacks!"

"Then tell me about Lamb," I asked.

"Will you let me know why you ask?"

"No, confound you, but I've asked you the question," I thundered at him.

"All right," said he. "You've got the winning hand, here, so I don't mind telling you that Charlie Lamb is right in town now, unless I'm terribly mistaken."

"In town now!" I gasped.

"Yes, he was putting up at the other hotel across the street just half an hour before you came drifting in."

I jumped back from him with a half-stifled shout. It was almost too good to be true.

"Where's that other hotel?" I demanded.

"Right down the street, hardly fifty yards. But you ain't aiming to make any trouble?" he began.

I jumped through the door without waiting to listen to him. Then I went out into the street, and started down the way, running. I remembered, then, that running would be no way to give me steady nerves in the hands and sure fingers. So I slowed up and walked along, conscious of the weight of the guns in my holsters, as they dragged against my legs.

Then, behind me, from the first hotel, I heard a yell. I turned and saw the deputy sheriff.

He was shouting at the top of his lungs, "Warn Charlie Lamb! Jacks is coming to murder him. Jacks has gone mad!"

That was it, was it?

I spun around and tried a snap shot at that sheriff, a hip shot, but a straight one; and I would have nailed him clean, except that as I fired he was leaping back through the doorway. I heard a crash of glass as the bullet smashed its way through a window; then I faced about, laughed again, and ran up the front steps of the second hotel.

I gave the lobby a glance, but there was nothing like big Charlie Lamb in it.

I stepped to the door of the dining room, but he was not there. Over in a corner, though, I saw a pretty waitress collecting some dishes from a place that had been laid; and something

about her prettiness made me as sure as a prophet that Charlie Lamb had actually been sitting in that chair.

Then I saw that there was no use going in the front way, if Charlie had made up his mind to dodge me and go out the back way. It might be hard to realize that Charlie would run away from me, but that seemed to be the case. So I whirled around and made for the front door, went through it on the jump; and, just then, I saw Charlie Lamb, racing old Cringle past the side of the hotel.

"Protect yourself, you cur!" I yipped at him, and got out both guns fast as lightning.

Maybe it was the speed that his horse was moving; but, anyway, I knew the instant that I pulled the triggers that I had missed him clean with the first try. I wouldn't miss him with the second. But, before I could put in a second shot, lightning flashed from the hip of Smiling Charlie, and I was knocked flat on the veranda.

I got up, with the blood pouring down over my face and clothes. Somewhere a woman was screaming something terrible, and men were running toward me.

Charlie Lamb was gone, and I couldn't hear even the beating of the hoofs of his horse.

He was gone, and the only sign of him was just a thin cloud of dust that was rapidly dissolving down the middle of the street.

The men came up.

"You're shot through the head, Jacks," they called to me. "You're a dead man!"

"You lie!" I told 'em. "No cur in the world can kill me like this before I've got my job done, and that job is the killing of Charlie Lamb. Stop that infernal woman from yapping, will you? And then give me some hot water."

I got what I wanted. The woman stopped screeching, and I swabbed off my head and saw that there was a furrow down the center of it.

I had to admire the skill of Charlie Lamb, to plant a shot like that from a horse that was galloping at full speed. There was a good deal of pain, and I had lost a little blood; but I plastered over that wound, and pretty soon I felt that I was ready for the trail again.

I had met Charlie Lamb, almost too soon to have it more than a dream. And my failure to shoot him down was like a dream to me, too. It never occurred to me for a minute to turn back. It never occurred to me for a minute to doubt that I would finally be able to kill him.

So, when I was patched up a little, I got out into the open, fetched my horse, and rode on through the town again. The deputy sheriff never as much as winked at me.

Perhaps he thought that I was due to get my share of trouble from Smiling Charlie and that there was no need in his dirtying his hands with me, or, perhaps, having one brush with me that day had been enough for him.

What mattered to me was that I was free to leave that town. The only thing that worried me, was that I had a mighty tired horse under me, and that Cringle had been running like a deer when I last saw him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LURE OF A LETTER.

IN this particular case, it was clear that Charlie had wanted to avoid me. But why had he kept on racing away, after he thought that I was dead and down?

Not that I bothered my head too much over what I felt to be very foolish details. No, I just let them rest, for I couldn't be troubled with side issues. What was really important to me was to get to grips with Charlie.

It wasn't particularly comfortable traveling that day. I had a horse that was completely worn out by the terrible traveling that I had given it. And my head was full of buzzings and songs.

But I pushed along until, in the late evening, I got to a river bottom with an old deserted shack in it. There I turned in and slept like a dead man.

I was up and out in the early morning, before there was even so much as a line of light along the horizon. The bay was still lying down; and he cocked his ears at me as I came up, as much as to ask me if I was a man or just a bad dream that was riding him to death!

I called him, and he lurched up with a groan, such as only a tired horse could give. He was getting badly spent. His coat was staring, his ribs were standing out, and his eye was dull. However, that didn't really touch my heart. If I rode a horse to death, it made no difference—so long as, at the end of the trail, I could kill Charlie, or Charlie could kill me!

I saddled him, therefore, gave him a swallow of water at the river, and barged on down the stream, where I came into a mite of a village just in the rose of the dawn. It was a pretty thing to see the light glistening on the dew-wet roofs and the windows of that village, while, farther away, the same sun swept the snowy mountains with flashes and waves of rose.

But, at that time, it was nothing but a place to get a feed for myself and oats for my horse.

I found the hotel; and, the minute that I got myself settled, a big rough gent came in with a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun under his arm. He put himself down in a corner chair, and pretended to read a newspaper that was sprawled across his lap. But, all the time, the gun was ready under the newspaper, and both of the two big muzzles were pointed steady at me.

I admired the quiet way of that fellow. And I could tell that he didn't mean a thing but business.

Well, I finished my breakfast; and, as I finished it, along came the proprietor of the place.

"You're Billy Jacks, ain't you?" says he.

I admitted that that was my name and asked him why he wanted to know. He said that he had a message for me, and he put down a little envelope in front of me with my name written in a big, strong hand. I knew that writing in a flash, for it was Smiling Charlie that had slashed down those letters. He wrote the same way that he rode—wild and wide and slanting.

I tore it open, and I saw on the inside this:

HELLO, OLD-TIMER: I suppose that you'll have this in the morning, and that you'll be hot to get on after me; but I can't help leaving you this note to warn you that you'll be killing your horse for nothing.

You can't catch me, Billy. You've made a good chase of it and a game ride which people will remember a long time. But you can never catch me. Not with Cringle under me. Ask the people of this town what shape they saw Cringle in, when I went through this evening. He's not worn out, and I don't intend that he shall be. But I mean to float away from you, old man, and never come back into your life again. Give up the trail.

In the meantime, I have to admit that I acted to you like a hound. However, I gave you or tried to give you a warning, and I also tried to make friends with you. If you had taken my offer then, there would never have been any of this trouble. Because I've never broken with a real friend, Billy.

No matter for these things. They're finished. You want my blood, and you won't be happy until you've had it, I suppose, though I can't see what has been my particular sin in flirting a bit with Betty. Heaven knows that I'm not the first man who has made love to her. But I suppose that I'm the first since she promised to marry you.

And yet, old fellow, you might remember that a girl like that can be perfectly good, and perfectly true to one man, while she flirts with half a dozen. It's rather her nature. And I know perfectly well that all the time that she was letting me pay attention to her,

she was entirely devoted to you. I didn't matter. I was a surface affair.

Will you try to believe that I'm talking to you honestly?

I don't suppose that you will.

Then simply believe this: I'm riding away in an air line for the nearest pass, and I'll never turn back or hesitate. So you can see that your good bay horse will never catch Cringle.

Good-by for the last time, Billy. And I'm honestly sorry that I can't see you again—and infernally glad that I didn't put a bullet through your brains earlier this afternoon!

Yours, CHARLES LAMB.

"How far," says I to this hombre, "to the nearest pass?"

"About thirty-five miles," says he.

I took a look at the mountains to the northwest. Of course, that clear Western air is a sure deceiver; but I know how to make allowances for that, as near as any man can, and it seemed to me to be nearer to fifteen miles than it did to thirty-five to that pass.

I says to him, "Ain't that split in the face of the mountains a pass?"

"Sure," says he, "that's the El Paso Grande."

"All right," says I, "and d'you mean to tell me that that pass is more'n twenty miles from here, at the farthest?"

"Partner," says he, with a grin, "it ain't more than eleven, but nothing but a bird could get there in a straight line."

"I ain't a bird," says I, "except in a manner of speaking, but let me know why I got to spend thirty-five miles for a thing that ain't more'n eleven miles away. I got a tired horse, you see?"

"I'll tell you how it is," says this gent, "you can't see anything from here, but the river which lies between you and the pass. And that river is about three miles of marsh and quicksands. It's better right now than at any season of the year. But it's too bad for anybody to cross it. A horse would sink inside of ten steps in that muck. And if the mud didn't get a man, why, the mosquitoes would!"

I looked at those mountains, so near and yet so far away. And then I looked down to the sagged head of the bay, and I thought of Charlie Lamb, sashaying away toward El Paso Grande and never thinking of me, except to laugh a little.

"Partner," says I to the stranger that had been handing out the information, "I been in a good many parts of the world, and I never yet have been in a place where there ain't some sort of a secret way of doing things that seem hard. Now tell me for a fact, ain't it true that there's some possible way of crossing that marsh?"

"You're in a powerful hurry, I reckon?" he asked.

And he squinted at me.

Well, I winked back. There was no harm in letting this feller figure that he had something on me. It would make him seem wise and in the know, and there ain't nothing that some people like better than to be on the inside.

"All right," says he. "If it's as bad as that for you, I'll tell you what I know. Are they close behind you?"

I saw that he thought that I was on the run, perhaps for sinking a slug into somebody.

I just turned around and squinted over my shoulder.

"Well," says I "they ain't in sight yet, thank Heaven!"

"Did you kill your man?" says he, more and more curious.

"I hope that he'll die!" says I, with a good deal of feeling.

Well, that was enough to convince this gent that I *did* have to get away. And he grinned at me, all on one side of his face.

"I been on the run myself," says he. "I'll tell you what I don't know, but what I've heard from them that—

ought to know. They say that, if a gent tries to cross that marsh in the narrowest places, he's sure to get beat. But, if he tackles it in the widest section, where the willows come away out from the banks of the river, then I understand that he has a bare chance of getting across—if the season is right! Mind you, this here ain't a promise, but it's what I've heard. You can take your chances, if you want to!"

I looked down to the head of the bay and laughed.

"I'd rather take a chance with any marsh than with the horse that I got under me. So long, partner. And thanks a lot."

"Don't mention it, old-timer," says he. "Best of luck to you. But if you get cornered, don't shoot to kill! That's where I showed some good bean work in the old days!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WIDE PART OF THE RIVER.

I COULD have laughed in his face, but I swallered the laugh; and, as I went up the line, jogging the bay, I says to myself that the best way to get on in this world is to let folks think that they're running the game and handling things, and that they got the inside dope on everything. It ain't flattering to yourself, but it extracts the things that you want from the other fellows.

When I got over the next hill, I headed down the long slope for the green stretch of the bottom lands along the river. And, after a while, I could see the place where the willows bulged away out, and that was where I headed.

When I got closer still, I could see the steam rising up from the marsh, like from a boiler on Monday. It was as bad looking a marsh as ever I saw, and I've been in Louisiana.

However, when I squinted ahead, I could see the mountains and El Paso Grande looking so close that it seemed to me that Smiling Charlie was already inside of my grip.

And that thought gave me enough courage to tackle anything.

I waded into the marsh. Before I'd gone a hundred yards, the bay went down up to the knees. I jumped off and he worked himself out and jumped back onto firm ground, snorting as though he'd seen a snake.

I let him stay there. I wouldn't tie him to a tree to starve to death in case Charlie killed me. And I wouldn't take him on with me, seeing that he couldn't possibly get through.

Well, as I was saying, I hit along ahead. And things were pretty miserable all around me. The trees were covered with slimy moss higher than I could reach, in most places; and some of the trees had given up the work of trying to hold their heads up to the light and fresh air. They'd bowed down, plumb spent. The leaves were gone from them; they were drenched in greenness and slime. They were twisted and naked looking—most horrible to see.

All their roots were mostly lost in the bog; and, when you stepped on a root, the rotten bark would peel off under your heel and let you dive down into the slushy filth.

Sometimes I was up to my chest, and sometimes I was up to my hips. But those were only patches; and, in between them, I would come to stretches of pretty good going, so that I could see that there was sense in the saying that the best place to cross the marsh was where it was the widest. Perhaps the reason was that here the ground was spread out at one level, so the water never stood as deep as it would in the narrower channels, and it would drain off quicker after the floods. But I kept on making pretty good time, and working hard.

Even in the best places, though, there were drawbacks, because I had to manage my rifle, keeping it out of the danger of water. And, with the other hand, I was usually hanging onto something to steady my footwork, which left the mosquitoes a free chance.

They were an intelligent lot, too, and didn't miss any openings. They came in hosts that looked like a black smudge of heavy oil smoke, at a distance. And, when they found me, they poised themselves, and then took a wallop at me with all their might. But pretty soon there was no longer any space left for the pickers and choosers, so the new armies lit wherever they could and helped themselves. When they had used up the skin on my face and neck, then they lit on my shirt and bit me clean through it, free and liberal.

I remember once, when I was toward the center of the swamp, that I put my hand on what I thought was a dead green limb; and the limb curled around with a nasty hiss, showed me a flash of eyes, and then sank two fangs into my arms.

Before I could so much as curse, the snake had slithered away through the scum of the marsh, and I didn't even roll up my sleeve to look at the bite. If it was poison, I would die. If it wasn't poison, I would live.

And, taking the chances that I was for the pleasure of shooting at Charlie Lamb, you can imagine that a little thing like a snake would never bother me any.

And then, when the perspiration was running down into my eyes, and my head was swirling hot and dizzy with the pressure of blood, I saw a bit of clean brown earth through a gap in the trees, made for it at a stumbling run, and came out, all at once, into the good honest sunshine, with the honest, brown earth under my feet once more.

Well, I was so done that, though there was still a cloud of mosquitoes trailing after me like a veil back of a woman's head, I just flopped on the ground, threw out my arms, closed my eyes, and lay there wondering if my heart wasn't going to crack open with the next beat.

But it didn't; and pretty soon I could get up and wave off the mosquitoes, and get along.

Well, I was fagged, and I still had a hard climb into the pass; but I felt that I had saved so many miles that I might have a pretty good chance of heading off Charlie Lamb.

And, even if I had got there in plenty of time, it might well have been that he hadn't headed for this pass at all, but had gone out of the valley in some other way.

However, he was so perfectly confident in his horse—and he was so apt to think that nothing in the world could possibly beat Cringle—that I was fairly sure that he would come this way. And, of course, he wouldn't have gone across that marsh!

At any rate, when I got up into the pass, there wasn't any sight of Smiling Charlie above me in the throat of the pass, or below me, where the trail bobbed among the hills. There wasn't any living thing near me except a flock of brown sheep up on a hillside, with a shepherd taking care of them and leaning on a rifle, like he knew how to take care of himself, too.

It always gave me a shudder to look at a bunch of animals like that under the care of a real, living man, who had to live in loneliness, like the brutes that he was caring for.

I took a look up the slope, and then I turned around and began to watch the lower valley. And, before I had been watching for five minutes, I saw a rider coming in his own little cloud of dust.

I was so excited that I didn't dare to look again for a while.

So I spent some time in cleaning my guns.

There was marsh water in all of them. I realized, then, that I should have tried both guns and the rifle after leaving the swamp, to make sure that they were free and fine. But I didn't. And now it was a lot too late.

However, it seemed to me that the gats were all in pretty fair shape.

So then I looked down the trail again, and this time, sure enough, it seemed to me that, by the size of the rider, it must be Smiling Charlie Lamb.

I looked down for another spell, holding my breath. The next glance made me dead sure. Yes, sir, it was Charlie himself!

Now, when I look back on that time, I often wish that I could give folks a picture of Smiling Charlie, as he looked on that day, when he came careening up the valley on old Cringle, the best horse in the world. And him the best man in the world, as far as that goes.

He come up the pass, letting Cringle take it easy. And, as he rode, Charlie was strumming away at his guitar, making music that was pretty good to listen to, I can tell you. Well, it did me good to see him!

If I was to kill him, I would never have to ask for a chance to kill a finer man. That much was certain. And I would never have a bigger or a fairer target.

I got my rifle ready, slid it out in front, lay on my belly, and let Charlie ride right into the sights.

He was a dead man. But somehow I couldn't pull the trigger.

Killing was what he needed, for my sake, and the sake of the world. But you see, he was meant to die fighting in the daylight, with hundreds against him. Somehow, I couldn't shoot him down like a dog.

Besides, as I had thought before, what was the pleasure of killing him by surprise, when he couldn't see death walking up on him?

To be concluded in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

A MONTANA GOLD STRIKE

A GOLD strike made some weeks ago in Beaverhead County, Montana, is said to give promise of being one of the richest made in that region in recent years. The mine was discovered accidentally when an automobile containing a party of mining men stuck in the mud. In looking about for rocks to drop in the mud hole under the wheels of the car, they found some pieces of rich ore and decided to put down a prospect hole. This prospect is situated about six miles west of Glen, and twenty miles north of Dillon, Montana.

One of the first carloads shipped from it is reported to have yielded eleven thousand dollars, and the ore contained sufficient bismuth to pay for the smelting.

Silver Glance

by Reginald C. Barker

Author of "The High Grader," etc.

ABOUT a mile above Silver Glance, on the south slope of War Eagle Mountain, stands the ruin of a great quartz mill, where, day and night without ceasing, for fifteen years a row of great steel stamps kept reducing to powder thousands upon thousands of tons of gold-bearing ore. These were fed to it by an endless procession of cars traveling down the wire cables of an aërial tramway a mile long, which led from the shaft of the War Eagle Mine near the summit of the mountain, to the great hopper which represented the gaping maw of the mill.

"Gold, gold, gold!" Through the dawns and twilights of fifteen years the great steel stamps sang their song.

Monotonously impartial in its basso profundo it drowned out the puny cries of new-born babes, the oaths of fighting men, and the last feeble groans of the aged. Meaninglessly reiterative, it pounded upon the eardrums of startled tourists as their cars dropped over the nearest mountain summit and they saw for the first time the huddle of dilapidated buildings of Silver Glance—once the richest mining camp in the Owyhee Mountains of southern Idaho.

"Gold, gold, gold!" Thunderous as the voices of chained mountain gods offering a bribe for their release, through the summers and winters of fifteen years the stamps of the War Eagle Mill sang their song to Matt Graham.

East of the Mississippi he was known as Matthew J. Graham, millionaire, but they called him "Old Matt" in Silver Glance. Fifty he might have been when I knew him and, from his high-topped laced boots to the crown of his battered and greasy hat, he was all man. He was accustomed to wearing a faded old red bandanna tied loosely around his corded throat. His gray beard was parted in the center. One could see the set of his jaw. Of course, Matt had the eyes that go with the name. The color of newly-broken blue granite they were; but there were times when they seemed to turn black. His voice was deep and slow and steady, like the song of the stamps he loved.

Matt used to go East to buy machinery and such stuff once a year, but he didn't like it.

"Felt like a black bean that got canned with a lot of white ones," he once remarked. "Entirely out of place."

Matt originally had a partner named Jackson. But he skipped out one day taking with him some fifteen hundred dollars' worth of gold that he and Matt had pounded out by hand. Matt was very ill at the time and when, at last, he got well he had to go to work by the day in another mine. He worked long enough to get a grubstake, then went back to his claims on War Eagle Mountain. Shortly after that he married a dark-haired girl named Mary Cairnes, the daughter of a mine foreman down at DeLamar where Matt had worked for a grubstake. He brought Mary back with him to his cabin on War Eagle Mountain. Together they opened up the vein, which ultimately made Matt the richest man in Silver Glance.

Somehow, though, Matt and his wife were not so happy as they might have been. They had hoped for children, but never had had any. Matt always said that it was because Mary worked so hard helping him to develop the mine. It might have been the case, too, for hammering drills, hour after hour, in hard rock is no work for a girl; neither is pushing a steel car loaded with a ton and a quarter of rock. Mary did both those things for years, and others that were even harder. When Matt remonstrated with her, she would stand on her toes, kiss his unshaven lips and say, "Some day we'll strike it rich. Then there'll be time to play."

They struck it rich, but by then they had forgotten how to play.

Matt wanted to build her a house in town, but Mary had views of her own and, as usual, she won.

So on the summit of War Eagle Mountain, eight thousand and thirty feet above sea level, Matt built his wife the house that she wanted. It cost sixty-seven thousand dollars. The door knobs were of solid silver. There was everything in that house that a woman could want, except children.

Built of native stone was Matt's house, with walls two feet thick and windows each three yards wide. Through the north windows, one could gaze across the vastness of the Snake River Plains; and on a very clear day, one could see the dome of the State capitol, nearly a hundred miles away. Sometimes at night, when the plain was all lit up by the twinkling lights of a hundred little farming towns and the broad band of the Snake River lay like a silver path beneath the moon, Matt and his wife would stand on the broad veranda of the great house.

Not even in winter, when the wind piled the snow in thirty-foot drifts around the great house, and the mail and supplies had to be brought up the mountain by men on snowshoes, would Mary leave. In vain Matt spoke of Europe—London, Paris, the Riviera. If there were sometimes an ache in his wife's heart, he never knew it. Or, at least, so thought Mary Graham.

"Some day," she would say, "the mine will peter out. Then we will go and see the world together. You know mines always peter out sooner or later, Matt."

"Let's go around to the other side of the house," Matt would growl, "and listen to the song of the stamps."

When they stood on the north side of the house, the mountain shut off the sound of the stamps; it was only from the south side that it could be heard.

"Gold, gold, gold!" The heavy rhythmic throbbing of the pounding steel shoes would drift up War Eagle Mountain, seeming to cause even the solid granite to quiver.

Beneath the great house on the summit, deep down in the heart of the

mountain, fifty men were drilling and blasting out the ore that, carload behind carload, slowly crawled down the aërial tramway into the cavernous maw of the great mill, where other men worked both day and night.

Such a great enterprise could not remain unknown. During the summer months, hundreds of people motored out from the State capital to satisfy their curiosity. Mary Graham entertained them all with a Westerner's lavish hospitality; but, although she was often invited to visit some of the women with whom she thus became acquainted, her reply was always the same:

"Matt does not like the city."

But if Matt didn't like the city, at least the city wanted the world to know about him; so often his photograph appeared in the local paper. With it, there once appeared a story of the War Eagle Mine and pictures of the works and the great house on the mountain.

Other papers copied the article and made a feature story of it; far and wide, it was circulated across the land. Whereupon, a certain type of reader began to write begging letters to Matt Graham, "the richest man in Silver Glance."

If Matt had been like many rich men, those letters would never have reached him; they would have been opened by a secretary. But, though Matt employed several bookkeepers, his only secretary was his wife. Not that Mary Graham had ever received any training for such a position; it had just happened that way from the first.

The mail used to arrive at Silver Glance on the stage, every afternoon. Mary would send a man for it on the electric tram, which ran down the side of War Eagle Mountain from the mine. She was always waiting at the head of the tramway when he returned with the mail. I seem to see her now —a quiet little dark-haired woman with patient eyes. She looked more like a mother than like the wife of a millionaire.

Often there was more mail than she could carry, and then she would have the man bring the rest of it to her in a room with a big stone fireplace and one of the windows that overlooked the Snake River Plains.

The first begging letter that Mary opened was such a surprise to her that it fell from her fingers into her lap while, with a queer expression in her eyes, she stared out of the big window. After a while, she opened another letter, and another, and yet another. Couched in different language, the contents of the four letters amounted to the same. They were appeals for financial aid from people who had read in the papers that Matt Graham was the "richest man in Silver Glance."

Matt laughed when Mary told him about the letters; but his laugh died when he saw the look of pain in her eyes.

"We've got so much, Matt," she said softly, "and they have so little."

"If we had spent our time writing begging letters," he asked gruffly, "where would we be now?"

Mary didn't argue with him; one might as well have argued with one of the great steel stamps in the mill. She just laid a hand on his arm.

"I'd like to help some of those people, Matt," she said. "May I?"

One day Matt stood in front of the stone fireplace looking down at his wife. He was in his digging clothes, just as he had come from the mine. A thin plume of steam arose from the drying mud on his overalls as he stood with his back to the fire. With his face tipped a little to one side and his battered, greasy hat far back on his head, he seemed to be listening to the muted throbbing of the great stamps in the mill.

The thick stone walls of the house seemed to quiver a little to the pounding of those tons of steel in their incessant labor at pulverizing rock.

"We can't run more than a year longer, Mary," said Matt suddenly. "The mine is petering out."

With the tip of a bronze-handled poker, Mary stirred the fire.

"We are rich now," she said. "What will we do with it all?"

"Go prospecting," said Matt, "and find another mine."

"I believe that you'd rather prospect than do anything else in the world," declared Mary.

"I get quite a kick out of prospecting," admitted Matt, "which is more than I can get out of city life."

Idly fingering a letter which lay in her lap, his wife looked up at him.

"Do you remember," she asked, "that when we were first married and were prospecting your claims together, you always used to follow my hunches?"

"I did," admitted Matt. "That's why we are rich now. Seems like you could see farther into the heart of a mountain than a mining engineer."

Mary seemed to be trying to gather courage to ask something which she feared would be refused her. Finally she whispered low, "Am I worth ten thousand dollars to you, Matt?"

As a father might smile at a child, Matt smiled down at his wife in her chair. Then he pulled from his hip pocket a check book, worn and covered with gray spots of candle grease and yellow daubs of mud. From the pocket of his muddy jumper, he took a fountain pen. On a teakwood table he signed his name to a check. Then Mary heard the chirring sound made by the parting of perforated paper as Matt tore the pink slip out of the check book.

Standing beside her chair, Matt raised a huge arm above her head, then he opened his fingers and let the check flutter down into her lap.

"Go as far as you like," he growled, as he bent over her for a moment, "I've got to be getting back to the mill now."

As he opened the door, the song of the stamps thundered into the great room.

"Gold, gold, gold!"

Mary glanced down at the pink slip in her lap; her eyes grew soft and moist.

For the check was not for ten thousand dollars; it had not been filled out. The only writing that it bore was the bold signature, "Matthew J. Graham."

That is how much Matt trusted his wife.

Because he trusted her, Mary filled out the check for ten thousand dollars and no more.

It did not last long, for Mary granted almost every request, for money that came through the mail. When she told him what she had done with the money, Matt grinned.

"You seem to get quite a kick out of helping folks," he chuckled, "that don't know enough to help themselves."

Now, many women would have kept on asking for money, until Matt would, at last, have been compelled to refuse. Mary was different; having her way had taught her many things, among which was the fact that the more one helps a beggar the more he will beg. So she began to write notes explaining why she could not accede to certain demands for help. But, when she found that such letters more often than not brought her insulting epistles in return, she wrote no more. She just sat by the big fireplace reading the begging letters and dropping them one by one into the fire.

Then one day came a solid envelope bearing an almost illegible superscription. When Mary had deciphered the letter contained in the envelope, she sat for a long time staring

into the fire. At last, she arose and called Matt over the telephone, which communicated with the office, the mill, and a station in the mine, a thousand feet beneath the summit of War Eagle Mountain.

The soiled note was from Bill Jackson, who, twenty years before, had skipped out from his own and Matt's share of the first gold that they had struck on War Eagle Mountain.

He wrote that he was destitute, and wanted to know if he could borrow a thousand dollars.

Now, in view of the way that Mary Graham had acted with other people who had requested help, one might have thought that she would have pleaded the cause of Bill Jackson. But she did nothing of the kind. To the utter astonishment of Old Matt, for the first time since their marriage, he saw a hint of iron in his wife's face.

"I knew that, if Jackson were alive," said Mary, "he would eventually read about your success in the paper. I knew that he would hear that we were giving away money; and I guessed that, if he were poor, he would appeal for aid. It cost me ten thousand dollars to find him, Matt. Now I am going to turn him down just to let him know that a woman never forgets. He took all that you had and left you almost dying alone on your claim. Let him suffer in the mill of the gods."

Matt sank down heavily in a big armchair. He had come directly from the mine. One could see where he had left the muddy tracks of his shoes on the velvet pile carpet. Mary sat facing him. Between the two, in the big stone fireplace, the embers of a fire glowed red.

Matt Graham possessed one of those natures, which seems incapable of contemplating revenge. As a matter of fact, he had not thought of Jackson for years. And Matt's innate kindliness was such that he had long since ceased to harbor any resentment against Jackson. For, as Matt saw it, the action of his partner had been responsible for his own good fortune. You see, Matt thought that he would never have met Mary had not Jackson run away with the gold. And none knew better than Matt that, without Mary, he might not have amounted to much.

"That is not any way to talk, Mary," said Matt at last. "You never knew Bill."

"You don't mean that you are going to let him have that thousand dollars," cried Mary.

"You bet I am," averred Matt. "You see, if things had gone a little different, I might have been Bill."

Naturally Mary could not understand that remark; nobody could have except Old Matt himself, and he did not choose then to explain. But Mary was not willing to let him off so easily, and Matt had never long offered resistance to Mary; so, at last, he capitulated to her pleadings.

"All right," he said, "you can write to Bill and tell him that if he wants to come to work for me we'll send him a ticket.

So Bill Jackson came back to Silver Glance after an absence of twenty years. With him he brought that which all Matt's gold had never been able to buy, could never buy.

Mary Graham caught her breath the first time that she saw Jackson's twelve-year-old-daughter. The child was standing on the mine dump, looking down at the mill where the great stamps were pounding out the ore. Her unbobbed yellow hair was streaming out behind her, and the stiff mountain wind was whipping her dress against her thin knees.

She turned as she heard Mary's footfall behind her and, for a moment, the childless woman and the motherless child looked into each other's eyes.

"I'm Mrs. Graham," said Mary, of-

fering her hand. She was fighting back an impulse to take the child in her empty arms.

Jackson's daughter looked at her soberly; then she nodded.

"I know," she said. "Dad told me about you. You are the richest woman in Silver Glance. I am Molly Jackson."

She raised a thin hand and pointed down the mountain toward where the mill was.

"What is making all that noise?" she asked.

Mary explained that it was the sound of the stamps pulverizing the ore.

"I don't like it," said the child. "It makes me feel afraid."

Nobody could resist Mary Graham for long, least of all a child. So she took Molly back with her that day to the great house on War Eagle Mountain. That evening, with her arms full of gifts, Molly returned to the cabin that Jackson had rented in Silver Glance.

In the big house on War Eagle Mountain, Mary Graham and Old Matt sat before the great fireplace. Mary's hand rested on his knee.

"I want," she said, "to adopt Molly Jackson."

Matt stared into the fire for a long time without answering. On his face was an expression such as is sometimes seen upon that of one who, coveting a treasure, is offered something "just as good."

"I don't know," he said at last, "do you think——"

"I don't think, Matt," interrupted his wife softly, "I know. Children have passed us by."

Far into the night they talked. Outside a wind moaned around the great house. Now and again, through the thick stone walls, came the muffled pounding of the stamps.

It was not easy to win Matt over. He had dreamed of a son of his own. But, in the end, Mary won.

"I'll see Jackson in the morning," promised Matt, "but don't expect too much."

But, when morning came, Old Matt had other things to think about; for, during the night, there had been a breakdown among the machinery in the mill. When Matt entered it, the great steel stamps had ceased their song. Suspended above the crushed ore, they hung like ten ugly dead Titans. It was evening before the break was repaired, leaving Matt free to call upon Jackson.

He came to the door in his shirt sleeves. He was a loose-mouthed man with porcine features and pale-blue eyes that never for a moment were still. Since his arrival in Silver Glance never, by word or sign, had he shown any gratitude; nor had he ever referred to the time that he skipped out with Matt's share of the first gold they had struck on War Eagle Mountain. Rankling in Jackson's heart was a bitter dislike for Matt and his wife—a dislike that he took no pains to conceal, as he stood in the doorway.

"Well," he asked, "what do you want?"

"It will take time to explain," replied Matt equably, "better ask me inside."

The house had been unoccupied for years, and the furniture was old-fashioned and scarred with usage; but Matt noticed that some one, probably Molly, had made everything neat and clean. When he entered, hat in hand, the little girl was seated by a table upon which stood a smoky lamp. There were traces of tears on her cheeks.

"Sit down," growled Jackson, pushing a chair forward with hit foot.

"I'd rather speak to you alone," hinted Matt.

Jackson turned to his daughter.

"Go to bed," he ordered.

For two hours, Matt argued with

Jackson, but nothing that he said seemed to have any effect upon the surly man facing him. In vain, Matt pointed out the advantages that he and his wife could give Molly. Hating Matt because he had been successful and because that very success had arisen from his own crookedness, Jackson saw an opportunity to satisfy that hatred by showing the rich man that there was one thing that his gold could not buy. With his warped brain filled with his own selfish desires, he gave no thought at all to the fact that, in turning down Matt's offer, he was depriving Molly of a love that he himself had never given his daughter. Not even when Matt offered to write him a very large check, could Jackson forego the pleasure of thwarting his old partner. And he was shrewd enough to know that his refusal would fall heaviest upon the woman whom Matt loved more than anything else in the world.

"No," said Jackson. "Keep your money. Hope that it'll do you lots of good. I've got something that your money can't buy."

He was right about that. For although Matt could have discharged Jackson, such an act would have done him little good. Feeling very helpless, he arose and turned to leave. As he reached the door and flung it open, the thundering of the stamps increased in volume.

"Listen to 'em," roared Jackson, "pounding out your gold!"

Matt was not a religious man but, living as long as he had with Mary, he could not have failed to learn some of the quotations that she was fond of using. One of them came into his mind as he stood at the door listening to the song of the stamps. Turning his head, he looked straight at Jackson and said:

" 'The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding fine.' "

Then he closed the door and went back to Mary.

Mary Graham listened quietly enough, when Mary broke the news to her; only by the clenching of her hands might one have known of her disappointment.

"I'll go and talk to Jackson myself to-morrow," she declared, "and make him see the error of his ways."

"He is working in the mill," said Matt. "Comes off shift at five. Anyhow, I don't think that your talking to him will do any good. May as well let it drop."

Mary did not argue about it then; but, after the mill hands had gone on shift next morning, she called to see Molly.

Matt was superintending some repairs in the mill, when a man came running to tell him that he was wanted on the phone in the office.

"It is Mrs. Graham calling," explained the messenger, adding, "an' she sounds like she's hoppin' mad."

Mary was "hoppin' mad." Matt saw that when, in obedience to her call, he entered the big room. Near the open fireplace, his wife stood by the side of Molly Jackson. The child's back had been bared, and across the thin white shoulders were three or four great black welts, such as might have been left by blows from a miner's leather belt.

"He beat her," Mary whispered huskily. "Her own father beat her because she accepted presents from me. What will we do, Matt? I'll never let Molly go back to him, Matt."

Matt Graham caught his breath, then into his blue eyes crept the black points that showed only when he was very angry. With one great arm he gathered Molly to him, in the other he held his wife; and, for a brief instant, he stood staring into the fire.

"You don't need to let Molly go back," he said. "I'll fix Jackson."

Just what he meant to do Matt hardly knew himself as he hurried down the mountain. All he knew was that the sight of those wide black welts on Molly's white shoulders had made him want to kill.

Suddenly he paused and listened. Something was missing—something to which his ears had been attuned for many, many years. The machinery had broken down again. The song of the stamps had ceased.

As he entered the mill, the foreman met him.

"Nothing serious," he reported. "We'll have her going again in a few moments. Belting came unlaced; that's all."

Matt hardly heard. Three at a time, he took the long flight of wooden steps which led to a platform some twenty feet above the stamps, where he knew that he would find Jackson working at oiling the bearings of the machinery.

As Matt stepped onto the narrow platform, the machinery began to whir, and again the building shook to the thunder of the steel stamps. The noise drowned out the sound of Matt's footsteps so that, not until his hand fell on Jackson's shoulder, did the man hear him.

Above the roar of the machinery, Matt's voice rose like the sound of a trumpet as, with his face within an inch of Jackson's, he bellowed:

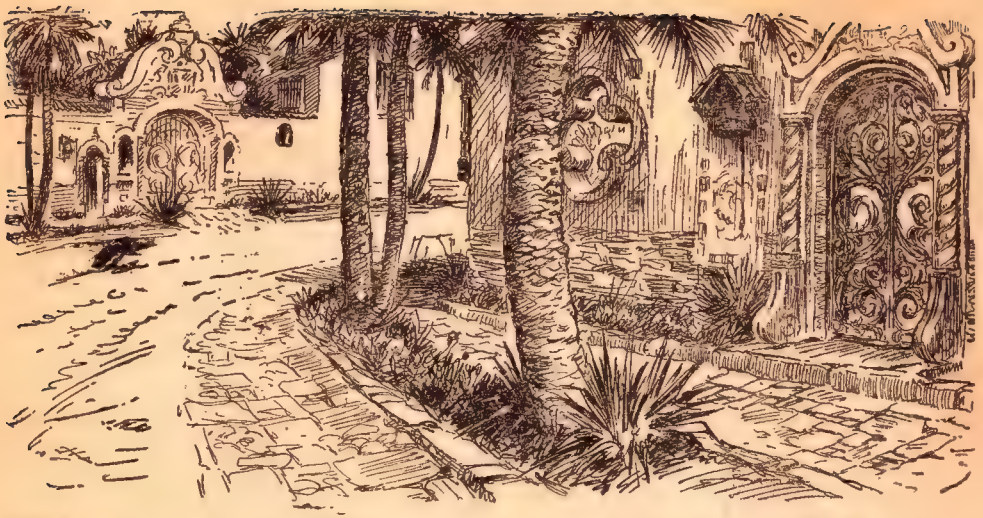
"Get out of here! Get out of Silver Glance before I kill you."

Wrenching himself free, Jackson backed away from the terrible wrath in Matt's eyes; foot by foot, he backed, backed—off the edge of the plank runway. A shriek was drowned by the whirring machinery. Then the frightened mill boss threw over a switch; pulleys, belts and wheels slowly came to a stop and, one by one, the red stamps ceased their song.

FASHION NOTE FOR COWBOYS

I SEE by the papers the time's come again
Tuh think about spring styles in clothes fer young men.
This here kind of neckties, that there kind of hat,
A new sort of socks, and a shoe toe that's flat!
Spring suits should be "bright hued"—like rosy romance!
And "sports" will continue in grain bags fer pants!
Spring styles! I ain't frettin' about no sech prattle—
I've got tuh find grass fer a herd o' pore cattle.
And yet—well, us cowboys have styles of our own.
I'll note 'em down here, jest in case they ain't known:
When spring comes it's stylish out here on the flats
Tuh peel off yer jackets and tip back yer hats;
Tuh complete fashion rules all us cow-punchers foller,
Reach up an' unbutton yer shirt at the collar!

S. Omar Barker.



Pioneer Towns of the West

Glendale, California

By A. V. Strope

Author of "Arkansas City," etc

THE city of Glendale is pleasantly situated seven miles north of Los Angeles and only fifteen miles from the Pacific Ocean. Part of Glendale is in the La Canada Valley, and the remainder either nestles among the valleys or rises from the slopes of the green Verdugo Hills. We may get some conception of its varied topography when we realize that the altitude ranges from four hundred and forty feet above sea level to something over four times that minimum.

All of Glendale, as well as the surrounding territory, once formed part of the Rancho San Rafael. About this wide domain and its owners, the Verdugo family, much of the early history of the region is centered. Jose Maria Verdugo, a valiant soldier in the days of the Spanish occupation, petitioned Pedro Fages, the first Spanish governor of California, for the land in 1784. In 1798 this grant was confirmed by a succeeding governor, and Don Jose became the ruler of the whole of La Canada Valley.

In return for this vast territory, Don Jose was required to raise and keep two thousand head of stock, build a stone house, and provide two *fanegas* of wheat or maize to be put at the disposal of the authorities.

Don Jose died in 1831, leaving Rancho San Rafael to his two children, Julio and Catalina, who held it in common for many years. But troublous times were ahead of the Verdugo family. Americans began to drift into the beautiful valleys of California, and a fierce rivalry grew up between these sturdy invaders and the firmly intrenched Spaniards. The rivalry between the United States and Mexico had some time since ended in war.

And after this, the Verdugo family did not fare so well. Although the United States government confirmed

the original grant to the owners, the improvident and easy-going Spaniards contracted debts, sold some of their land, and lost more through litigation.

General Joseph Lancaster Brent was the first American to own land in what is now Glendale. In 1855, he purchased from the Verdugos six hundred and forty-one acres along the river. He was an outstanding American of his day, a brilliant attorney, very influential in politics.

Captain C. E. Thom and his nephew, Judge Erskine M. Ross, took an active part in the founding of the city of Glendale. The former had made the long and perilous trek overland from Virginia in 1849 to prospect for gold near Sacramento, and was one of the few who survived the typhoid epidemic that laid the gold camp low. After the Civil War he built up a law practice, and became the largest individual taxpayer in Glendale.

He and other Americans, who took up land in the La Canada Valley, turned the grazing grounds into orchards of peach, orange, lemon, plum, and apricot trees.

In 1885, when the famous land boom reached Rancho San Rafael, there was a drying field for fruit where now the city hall stands. Several of the settlers pooled part of their orchards in 1887 and plotted the town site of Glendale on this land. At this time, there was considerable confusion about the name of the town. Some people in California spoke of the locality as Verdugo, others as San Rafael, and still others as Portosuelo. In 1886, when establishing a post office for the new town, the United States government named it Mason; the county called the school district Sepulveda; while the Southern Pacific Railroad, building a depot in 1887, gave it the name of Tropico. Dissension over the naming of the town arose among the residents and, as a result, two towns were established—Glendale and Tropico. It was not until 1918 that the latter united with the original settlement and accepted its name.

The land boom was followed in the early '90s by a ten-year period of industrial depression, so that, in 1900, the population of Glendale did not include many more than three hundred persons. Only three blocks of the town had cement sidewalks; there were no gas or electric lights; while a high school and a library for the community existed only in the dreams of its members.

By 1906, however, Glendale had grown sufficiently to justify its incorporation as a city of the sixth class. Perhaps the greatest impetus was given to this development by the electrification of the railroad line to Los Angeles.

In 1925, the population was estimated as sixty thousand, an increase of three hundred and eighty-seven per cent in fifteen years.

The city's proximity to Los Angeles accounts in part for its development. Delightful climatic conditions—sunshine all or part of three hundred and fifty-four days a year, cool summers and warm winters—are also responsible. The enterprise of its citizens is another great factor in the building up of Glendale.

To-day its various institutions, devoted to community service, are among the best in the West. Its public educational system includes twelve grammar schools, two high schools, and one night school. In 1900, Glendale had no library at all; now it has one main building and three branches. Four hospitals, several sanitaria and rest homes, and twenty-five churches have risen about the hamlet of the nineties.

Glendale is on the main line of the Southern Pacific. The Union Pacific and the Santa Fe provide transportation to their stations in Los Angeles, while the Glendale & Montrose Electric goes into La Crescenta Valley.

Such splendid transportation facilities have brought many industrial plants to Glendale.

The city maintains an extensive water supply system and operates an electric power plant. The water is is drawn from deep wells. Natural gas is furnished consumers at low rates.

Within the boundaries of Glendale are three parks—Brand, Fremont, and Nibley. Adjoining the city on the west lies beautiful Griffith Park, a glorious mountain playground, whose thirty-two hundred acres are crowned by peaks that rise two thousand feet toward the azure California skies.

The government of Glendale is vested in a mayor, a city manager, and a council of five. The councilmen have full legislative powers. The Hon. Harry G. MacBain, an investment realtor, is, at present, mayor.

Frank L. Fox, head of the large Fox-Woodsum chain of lumber yards, is one of the chief civic leaders and president of the Chamber of Commerce. Howard I. Wood, the secretary of the Glendale Chamber of Commerce, is doing much to further the progress of the city. The latter told me recently:

"Our principal historic shrine is the Verdugo homestead, where descendants of the first Verdugo family are still dwelling. Señora Maria Antonia Lonjina Verdugo de Chavoya has lived contemporaneously with every president of the United States except Washington."

OLD-TIME PLACER MINER PASSES ON

WITH the recent death at Twin Falls, Idaho, of Nelson Criswell, another picturesque figure of the early days of pioneering in that State passed over to the Great Majority. Nelson Criswell had been a resident of Idaho since 1871, migrating in that year from Kentucky. For a number of years he worked placer claims along the Snake River. Later, when the country around Twin Falls was brought under irrigation, he settled with his family on a tract of land north of Filer, where he lived up to within two years of his death.

IDOLS INDICATE ANCIENT RACE

THE discovery of a number of idols of novaculite, some weeks ago, in the vicinity of Jonesboro, Arkansas, is said by scientists to indicate the existence in prehistoric times of a race more ancient than the Indians. Novaculite is a very hard, fine-grained rock, of the kind generally used in whetstones.

Among the images carved in this substance was a life-size head, with eyeballs of silver and pupils of copper. Other articles included in the new find were human heads and hands and feet, carved in black trap stone, and images of frogs, eagles' heads, alligators, and snakes. There were also marbles of colored stone and a jewel box of lavalike materials.

Snakes' End

Edward T. Glynn

Author of "Same Birthday Cake for a Wolf," etc.

CROUCHED in the scant shade afforded by the low, rocky wall of a narrow desert gulch, the two men eyed each other in open hate and suspicion across an intervening stretch of sun-parched, simmering sand.

Both men bore the marks of hunger, thirst and toilsome travel on their bearded, haggard faces. Their eyes were red and swollen, their lips puffed, distorted, their beards caked with a fine, powdery silt, blackened by their grimy perspiration.

In silence they had sat there now for, perhaps, an hour, each absorbed in his own precious line of thoughts, their gaze occasionally drifting out furtively across the wide, open stretch of lifeless, withering wastes beyond.

In front of the larger of the men, "Big Ed" Carney, a canteen lay on the ground—a canteen that held but a few more gulps of priceless water; all the water——

Big Ed Carney cracked a grim little smile, reached for the canvas-covered bottle and slowly raised it toward his lips. There was a look of almost fiendish delight in his evil face as, covertly, he noted the way in which the smaller man—"Snake" Fallon—was viewing his tantalizing act.

Though he took out a meager swallow, he purposely held the bottle to his lips for several aggravating seconds, grinning anew under the cover of his beard at the patent, growing misery of the watching, envious Snake.

With a last taunting smack of the lips he finally lowered the canteen, cracked another evil grin and deliberately made to restore the cork. As he did, the smaller man suddenly edged a bit forward, hand outstretched, and whimpered into speech.

"Cripes, Ed, give us a drink—one little taste," he begged. "I'm plumb burnin' up."

Big Ed Carney's grin abruptly gave way to a truculent sneer. With an oath

he corked the bottle and shook it in the other's face.

"No, not a drop, not another sup—not till I know we're close to more," he declared wrathfully. "All what's left is just another swig or two, an' you can bet I'm savin' them for my own sweet self! Didn't I warn you plenty times to ease up on this water all day long?" he continued accusingly. "Didn't I say we'd sure run low—same's we have—an' maybe——"

He paused, shrugging a suggestive shoulder; then went on, more bitterly than ever:

"Dog-gone you for a bunglin', no-account fool anyhow, Fallon. If you hadn't went an' kilt that blamed ol' coot we robbed back there we'd never be a a-cussin' ourselves like now. We could o' stuck to the hills and got away clean."

Under the bigger man's accusing, venomous gaze Snake Fallon's evil face went red in a sudden rising passion of his own.

"What you meanin', Ed; what you' gettin' at?" he demanded abruptly. "If it hadn't been for me—why, if I hadn't done went an' plugged that danged ol' coot, he'd a sure plugged you, an' don't forget that! Whilst you was lookin' for his pokes I see him fishin' out a gun from under his pillow."

"Yeah, maybe you did, but that don't mean you had to go an' shoot him!" said the other sneeringly. "You could o' bashed him on the head quietlike, couldn't you, an' let it go at that? Firin' them shots! Well, they sure must o' woke up the whole blamed camp, an' now we're plumb on the prod.

"Only chance we've got is to buck this desert an' buck it dog-gone fast. If you'd only used some sense! But then you didn't, an' now—well, now we've sure got to pay for it, but you'll pay most!"

As he finished, Big Ed shoved out a menacing jaw and fixed a baleful, challenging eye on the other's twitching face. There was a momentary silence, one vibrant in its tensity. Slowly, cautiously Snake Fallon then groped with clawlike fingers for the holster at his side. With a sudden, jeering laugh Carney broke the strain just as Fallon's fingers closed on the butt of a long, blue-barreled .45.

"Honin' to get me with that last little shot o' yourn, ain't you, feller?" he sneered. "Itchin' to plug me cold an' grab this water an' both them pokes all for your ornery self? Well, go ahead an' plug me. Go ahead an' shoot if you dare! I know you don't!"

He shoved out his jaw again and slowly got to his feet.

"Little good this gold or water would do you, Snake, case I was a deader myself," he continued meaningly, "an' well enough you know it. Only for me you'd never make it out this desert, never make that next nearest spring; you'd——"

He broke off with another nasty little laugh, hung the canteen at his side and made to turn away.

"No, Snake, I ain't none afraid o' that dog-gone bullet you still got left, an' you can sabby why," he added presently. "Only chance you got is to follow me, an' not my ghost. Better pull yourself together, leave that gun alone, an' let's push on. If we don't hit water 'fore I've guzzled up this little bit we've still got left—well, I sure does hope you puts that bullet right where you hones to put it now!"

He paused a moment, leering down in fresh contempt upon the crouching, inwardly fuming Fallon; then calmly wheeled away, swept a close-squinted, all-seeing gaze out across the desert and started slowly down the gulch.

"Come on there, Snake; better get a wiggle on," he called back as he shagged along. "If you done aims to wet them fangs o' yourn again you gotta stick close to me. I'm playin' a hunch

there's water just ahead—plenty; but if——"

A look of baffled, murderous rage showing in his face, Snake Fallon quickly gained his feet. Shoving the half-drawn .45 back into its holster, he mouthed an imprecation and cut in upon the other's words.

"Well, play it right then, Carney, 'cause if you don't, it's apt to be the last dog-gone hunch you'll ever play at all!" he averred snarlingly. "Holdin' out that water on me!"

Halting in his tracks, the other glanced back. Lids narrowed down to the merest slits, he met the smaller man's gaze with a look that wasn't good to see. When he spoke there was a cold, hard challenge in his tones that Fallon couldn't help but get.

"If you thinks you can make your own way out, find that spring," he said.

Fallon swore again. Something in Carney's cool, leveled gaze made his own eyes blink.

"If—if I did," he stammered, "you can bet——"

Carney gave way to another rasping, mirthless laugh, turned on his heel and, without another word, resumed his slow, shuffling gait down the narrow rocky gulch. Fallon stood for a moment, hand again groping slowly toward his holstered gun, then shook his head, smiled evilly, and shambled on behind.

Upon the lips of Big Ed Carney there played a new sort of smile as, presently, he reached the end of the gulch and struck off straight across the glaring, burning reaches of endless sands beyond.

Though fully aware of the murderous look in the eyes of the trailing Fallon, he shagged along without any seeming fear of being downed by a bullet in the back. Downed by the one last bullet he knew that Fallon was saving for an end, a trick he'd never get the chance to play!

"Nope, I don't need to fear him now; not yet a while, anyhow," he mused to himself as he plodded on. "He's plumb got to bank on me to see him through; get him out o' this desert—back where the walkin's good."

His grin underwent a queer little twist at a vision that arose in his thoughts. That once they were out of the desert—if out they really got—Fallon meant to kill him; shoot him down in the same cold-blooded manner in which the wretch had slain the patriarchal victim of their recent crime back on the desert edge. With the ill-won gold now sagging in the pockets of their coats, a poke apiece—a cool ten thousand—Carney's smile gave way to another wicked sneer, and into his face there crept a look of evil, gloating greed.

"Don't think I'm none hep to the kind of a snake he is, eh?" he mused inwardly as he plodded slowly on. "Don't think I'm none wise to what happened to that last little pal o' his down in the Mojave, eh? Figgers he'll trick me the same, huh? Figgers he'll bump me off soon's we're out o' the desert an' grab these pokes all for his own sweet lonesome? Well, just let him wait for another half hour!"

He trudged along absorbed in a new mental picture born of his own scheming thoughts.

Two miles farther on, and Carney knew they would come to the water he had promised; two little crystal springs hidden well back from the open trail in a clump of rocks, one of them pure and safe, the other deadly poison! To a man as thirsty as he purposely meant that Fallon would be by the time those springs were reached both of those pools would look alike, taste alike; unless a man was duly warned of——

Carney chuckled to himself again and mentally reviewed the grisly scheme he had in mind.

"Soon's we hit them pools I'll make it straight for the one I know is safe," he mused, "an' Snake——" His grin widened. "Well, let him poison up his fangs at the other! Two or three swigs, an' I guess he won't none rattle his tail no more.

"Ain't no chance he'll up an' plug me 'fore we get there—none whatever," he continued, self-assuredly. "Ain't no chance he'd up an' plug me anyhow, not until we was out o' this desert for keeps. Don't know the way himself; couldn't make it in a million years. Plumb got to bank on me, an' that's where I sure got the edge.

"If I only had a gun myself! If only I was sure I could jump him! Howsomever——"

His grin changed back to a crafty, gloating sneer, and quite unconsciously he quickened his pace toward the fateful goal ahead. Trudging doggedly along in the rear, his thirst growing more torturous with every passing minute, Fallon let his hand slide toward his gun half a dozen times; but each time he shook his head, let the gun stay home in its holster and twisted up his lips in a smirk that plainly boded the man in front no good.

"Nope, I can't do it yet, can't drill him now—not yet a while, anyhow," he inwardly cautioned himself. "Plumb be suicide, just like he says, tryin' to make it out o' this place alone. Gotta follow him! Well, just let me once get out o' this desert—get back to where I know it's safe!"

His grin abruptly faded out, and his lean, hard jaw clamped shut in a way that had a menacing meaning of its own.

Half an hour later Big Ed Carney came to a halt in a little maze of rocks, glanced around and raised a cry of well-simulated triumph.

"Well, here we are, Snake! Water—plenty o' water! Two big springs right ahead!" he exclaimed. "What'd I tell you, Snake? What'd I say? Step on it there!"

The puffing, panting Fallon, trailing half a dozen steps in the rear, waited to hear no more. With close-squinted eyes focused on the pools, he now came forward at a quickened, eager pace. The vengeful, scheming thoughts in his mind were at once forgotten in the pleasanter prospects of the cooling, coveted drinks so near at hand; drinks that would mean—— He shot a sneering, venomous look at the bigger man already down on his knees beside the nearest of the springs and half ran, half staggered toward the other.

Out of the corner of his eye Carney watched as Fallon sprawled upon the ground and gulped down a generous swig of the poison water. Into his face there crept the light of a sinister triumph as Fallon drank again—gulped long and greedily of the tempting, treacherous nectar that so quickly now would seal his doom!

His thirst finally appeased, Fallon got slowly to his feet, seemingly unaffected, at least for the moment, by the deadly drafts he had taken. He stood for a moment closely eying the smugly-grinning Carney; then abruptly reached for his gun in a way that brought a startled, horrified cry from the other's lips. Reeling back against a near-by rock, Carney, his face gone suddenly pale, flung out a hand in frenzied protest as Fallon swept the weapon into aim.

"Snake, don't do it! Don't plug me!" he screamed. "Don't be a fool. You ain't none out o' the desert yet, Snake; you ain't——"

Fallon advanced a step or two nearer to the other, clicking an oath as he did.

"Nope, I ain't a-goin' to drill you, Carney, not unless I hafta; not now, anyhow," he said. "I ain't no fool to go do that. I ain't takin' no chances on this desert, not unless——" He

paused a moment, a malignant sneer on his lips; then added:

"Carney, what I want is that canteen. Fork it over now, an' fork it over quick! I'll tote the water from this place on. I've done my little bit in——"

He stopped abruptly, a ghastly, sickly pallor coming quickly to his face. Eyes bulging from their sockets, he stood for a moment swaying on his feet; then gave vent to an agonized groan and staggered back against a rock. From his nerveless, numbing fingers the leveled gun fell upon the sands; frantically he clutched at his throat and swept a palsied hand across his dizzy, reeling brow.

"Cripes, that water—I'm poisoned!" he suddenly gasped. "Carney, I'm pois——"

He groped out blindly for support, found none, then slumped to the ground in a grotesque heap. Over the face of Big Ed Carney there slowly spread a look of evil satisfaction. Into his eyes there came the light of a final triumph; in two long strides he reached the other's twitching body, flopped it over on the sands, none too gently, dragged from Fallon's pocket a well-filled poke of gold.

Scooping up the fallen gun, he drew back a step or two and stood for a space sneering down at the moaning, stricken rogue huddled on the ground at his feet.

"Still got a kick in his tail, but good as dead already," he murmured gloatingly. "Sure got fooled that time, didn't you, Snake, an' that a-plenty! Savin' this shot for me, eh? Well, you saved it a minute too long!"

He laughed jeeringly a moment; then added, a new expression on his face:

"Well, guess this leaves me sittin' pretty—canteen, gun, gold an' all. Plenty o' water an' good, clean chance to get away. One shot left—just one—an' only for that——"

He laughed again, shook his head and turned away from the slowly twitching body on the sands.

Five minutes later, his canteen filled and a poke of gold now sagging low in either pocket of his coat, Carney picked his way back through the labyrinth of rocks and resumed his trek across the open stretch of burning, blighted wastes beyond.

Trudging along at a slow, leisurely gait, he immersed himself in thoughts that in no way concerned the fate of the man he had left behind. Visions of the pleasanter things which lay ahead brought to his lips an eager, gloating smile and left him immune to even the pitiless, piercing rays of the noonday sun that rode in the cloudless sky above.

"Yeah, I sure been a-playin' in luck, an' no doubt about it," he exulted to himself as he plodded on. "Lucky that Fallon didn't know the desert; lucky that I didn't take no chance an' try to jump him. It's good that I was hep to his game; knew about those springs. Yeah, luck is sure all mine, an' it never come sweeter! Another day or two, down across the line—all this gold——"

Again there arose from the ill-gotten wealth in his pockets cheerful, alluring visions that left him shagging slowly onward utterly oblivious to all things else.

It was mid-afternoon when Carney came plodding up to a row of high, copper-colored buttes, picked out the coolest spot he could find in their shade and flung himself down wearily upon the sands. Unhooking the canteen from his belt, he raised it to his lips and took a long, deep drink. Smiling in smug satisfaction he presently corked the bottle, tossed it on the ground at his side and eased himself into a more comfortable position, his back propped against a rock.

"Reckon I'll just bog down here for two or three hours an' take a little nap," he mused half aloud, half to himself as he fell to mopping his red, perspiring face. "No need me buckin' this dog-gone sun no more! Guess there ain't nobody crowdin' me close; ain't seen no signs of a posse yet. Well, guess it's plumb safe enough to hole up here until the sun goes down.

"Got plenty o' water, plenty o' time; got rid o' Fallon." He grinned at something in his thoughts, then added: "Come night, come a little cooler, I'll shag it on again, plug it straight ahead. Come to-morrow noon——"

Once more he lapsed into a contemplation of certain pleasant visions that arose in his thoughts; visions that brought to his lips a new sort of smile as, presently, the brooding, softly crooning silence of the desert closed his wearied eyes in sleep.

How long he dozed he did not know; perhaps it was an hour, perhaps a little more; but, when he abruptly awoke, the sun was still riding high above the buttes, and the heat was even more oppressive, more stifling than ever.

Vaguely aware of some impending danger—some creeping peril that was nearing as he slept—Carney rose to a sitting posture blinked his eyes and slowly gazed around. At first he saw nothing, sensed nothing; and then, of a sudden, his blood went cold. There, less than a yard away, coiled upon the sands close to where his canteen lay, was coiled menacingly a big diamond-back rattler.

Already the upraised tail of the snake was sounding its angry, fateful warning; already the reptile's ugly, weaving head was lancing out to strike. Carney's heart at once went sick and cold within him. Aghast, he sat there staring at the hideous, coiling menace, too horrified to move, too appalled to even think. Louder grew the sound of the angry, whirring rattler; higher rose the vicious, darting head. Another moment, the instant he budged——

With a sudden, gurgled sound that was half a curse and half a groan, Carney abruptly reached for the gun in his pocket, whipped it into aim and fired wildly, blindly, a single shot—the one last shot. Even as the gun went off Carney felt a sharp, quick sting on his cheek. He screamed aloud in a sudden, fresh horror born of what that sting would mean!

In a panic he flung away the now emptied weapon, sprang to his feet and clapped a hand to his face. Quickly he drew the hand away, looked for the telltale signs of crimson and blinked in obvious wonderment when there was none to behold.

Through the lifting haze of powder smoke he then caught a glimpse of something on the ground—something that brought to his lips a queer little smile and eased the chilling, sickening fears still gripping at the heart within him. It was the headless body of a snake twisting and threshing about on the ground in the final throes of its grisly end.

Awed by the sight of it, Carney stood for a moment inwardly exulting at the luck which still seemed playing in his favor, luck that made him smile anew in the reassuring knowledge that, after all, he wasn't hurt himself. Then, quite by chance, his gaze drifted just belond the flailing body of the headless snake to the spot where his canteen was lying, and a startled, chagrined cry escaped his lips.

Heart again going sick within him, he quickly bounded forward, scooped the canteen up and almost sobbed in the blank dismay that swiftly overcame him.

"The canteen—it's drilled!" he cried. "That shot went through the snake and through this. Cripes, no water! Thirty, forty miles!"

With a despairing curse he glanced

toward a darkened spot on the ground where the last of his all-precious water had already seeped into the parching soil, took the useless canteen up in his hands and flung it back among the rocks. Dumbstricken by this sudden calamity which thus had come upon him, he stood for a space staring glumly out across the desert.

Something in the gaunt, stark desolation of it all—something in the very vastness of the place itself—sent a shudder down his back. Slowly he glanced above and mouthed another imprecation at sight of a small, black dot circling high above the buttes.

As though to mock his very words, the buzzard took a sudden downward plunge, circled widely once more and then came to light on the top of the buttes. With a groan of frank dismay, Carney again shook a futile fist at the watchfully waiting vulture, shuddered at something in his thoughts, and then glanced ruefully back along the trail he had come.

"Nope, it ain't no use. I'm good as done," he muttered half aloud, half to himself. "That dog-gone buzzard's got my number, got me spotted right. No use me goin' back to where I did for Fallon. No use——"

Something far out upon the desert suddenly caught his gaze and brought to his face a queer little grin. Coming straight his way, their mounts half hidden in the haze of heat, was a group of horsemen. It took Carney but a moment to guess who they were, what they were, and why they were coming!

"Cripes, a posse! They've got me! That shot—they must o' heard it!" he cried. "I ain't got a chance."

In utter desperation he glanced toward a lava bed that stretched out for endless miles in a labyrinthian tangle from the base of the buttes and started toward them on the run. Once among that maze of rocks, with night coming soon—if only—— Half a dozen steps he took, and then stopped short, groaning to himself as he did. Without any water, any chance, any hope!

"Dog-gone that shot! Dog-gone the luck," he groaned openly. "Blast this desert; blast the gold! Wisht I'd put that bullet in Fallon; wisht I'd——"

The buzzard on the crest of the buttes abruptly took to flight again, and Carney caught the sound of its fluttering wings. He glanced above and grimaced oddly as the vulture winged away. He watched it go for a moment, watched it circle high in the air; then gave a little shrug, tightened the smile on his lips and turned to face the nearing riders.

He knew they wouldn't show him any mercy, knew it wouldn't do him any good to ask for any. He shrugged again and glanced once more into the sky. He could see only a black dot.

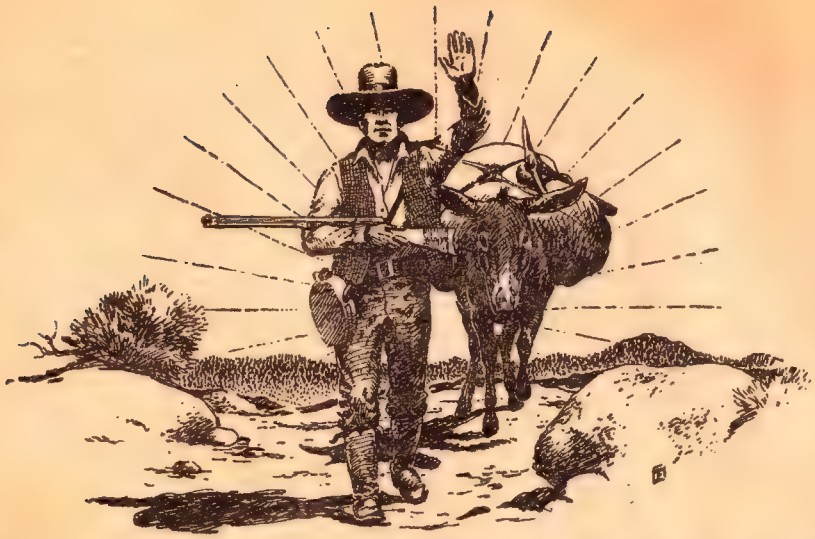
There was something like a sneer on his lips when the posse came pounding up a minute or so later, and the grim-faced riders slid to earth, guns leveled. A big, burly man who packed a star on his vest at once stepped forward and deftly clapped a pair of handcuffs on the cornered Carney's wrists.

"No need o' these cuffs here, sheriff. I seen you comin'; I'm givin' myself plumb up," protested the prisoner scornfully. "I've just done fired my last little shot."

The sheriff laughed.

"Yeah, you bet you have," he interposed meaningly. "We done heard it out on the desert. Found that snaky little pal o' yourn back near the poison spring. Couldn't save his ornery life—wouldn't o' done him any good even if we had; but he plumb 'fessed up to the whole dirty deal afore he cashed. We've been a-trailin' you since, but was afraid you'd got away."

"Might have, too, only for that shot. We just was thinkin' you'd doubled back an' plumb given us the slip!"



Miner's Potlatch

By J. A. Thompson

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE desires this department to be of real assistance to all who are interested in the practical side of mining. Questions pertaining to field conditions, mining equipment, mining territories, mining laws, prospecting and general geology will be answered.

Address all communications to J. A. Thompson, mining expert, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

SUPPOSE I have my camping equipment, supplemented by a shovel or two, a gold pan, a pick, and the other elemental equipment a lone prospector would need, and have landed in a territory which I believe to contain gold or other valuable minerals, what do I do next?" J. M. P. of Chicago bluntly asks. He has, he says in the beginning of his letter, lived a great deal in the outdoors so isn't worried about "his morning flapjacks and looking after himself from the camper's viewpoint." But, when it comes to prospecting, J. M. P., in his own words, says, "They just don't come any greener than I am."

J. M. P.'s question is a big order. Much will depend as to where he has landed, in what type of country, whether in a new field entirely or in an already pretty thoroughly prospected area, and what season it is. But as his question is pretty broad, a general answer, setting forth certain rules for every prospector to follow, will have to suffice. Unless of course, at some future date, he writes more fully and explains just where he actually has landed. Definite information will then be obviously valuable to him.

Rule number one, which should be in large type on the first page of every prospector's primer is to examine every rock exposure with the utmost care, giving special attention to the line of contact between two kinds of rock.

The line of demarcation between two

types of rock formation is always a favorable place for mineral to accumulate. Examine such a line and its vicinity.

A granite mass or similar rock cutting through such rocks as slate or limestone is what is known as a dike and has, as a rule, more or less mineral associated with it. Even if the dikes themselves are not mineralized, they almost invariably occur in regions where valuable deposits of ore are located. Dikes are something definite to look for. Technically, a dike is rock which was once molten and has forced its way into a fissure or crack in the adjacent rock formation. In exceptional cases, they may extend from fifty to a hundred miles. Or they may be only a few yards in width. In thickness they vary from a thin line to hundreds of feet. It is interesting to note—and to bring home the importance of dikes—that most of the leading mines of the world are within or are connected with a zone of intrusive rock. Dikes are intrusive rock. They differ in texture as well as in composition from the rock which they invade. The line of contact is usually well defined. Even a schoolboy, after having seen one, could readily point out the next one that he came across. One or many dikes may be contained in a section. They may run in the same direction or cross one another at all angles.

Stains are another telltale indicator to the prospector of the presence of mineral deposits. The subject is one which, to be given but bare justice, will have to be taken up in another article, though a few of the more prominent mineral stains are listed here now.

Ores of copper usually stain the surrounding vein blue or green in spots. Deep copper deposits are sometimes capped by dark-brown powdery iron rust to be found directly on the surface rock.

Cobalt ores are indicated by a stain in the vein rock varying from a light pink to rose red.

Pale green stains, easily distinguished from the emerald-green copper stains, often point to a valuable deposit of nickel.

Either a bright red or a pale yellow ochre results from surface changes of galena, one of the principal lead ores, and an ore in which silver is frequently associated.

So much at present for surface stains and dikes.

Examination of the stream gravel is of paramount importance. Stream gravel, as a rule, will contain more or less of the mineral occurring within its drainage area, especially if the fall of water is steep and the country broken. If promising indications are found by the aid of the pan in the river bars, the source should be looked for farther upstream. Should any of the following minerals occur in the material examined, the pan, if properly handled, will save them. Gold, silver, platinum, metallic copper, iron ores, iridium, tungsten ores. The above list is sketchy and does not, of course, include all the minerals that the pan will save.

If a mineral such as gold or platinum is found in sharp, angular pieces, the source is likely to be close at hand. If the pieces found are smooth, rounded, and well river-worn, they may have been carried to their present position from a source quite a long way upstream.

In examining river gravel, always remember that a heavy mineral is more apt to lodge at a turn in the stream than where the channel is straight. Any terraces left by the stream, before it cut itself down to its present level, should be carefully examined.

Thoroughness and acuteness of observation of the points enumerated above are factors upon which a prospector's success will, in a large measure, depend.

To L. F., Augusta, Maine. Recent reports in the mining journals say that mining in Sierra County, California, has been undergoing a mild boom. Since you ask for specific information in regard to the mines affected, the following will be of interest. The Big Bald Top in the Scales mining district, eight miles northwest of Downieville, is being opened and equipped by E. W. Hartman of Grass Valley, California. The property was originally a part of the McMahon ranch and was partly hydraulicked.

The old Eureka mine at Eureka is being opened after having been shut down for forty years.

The Brandy City property owned by a Los Angeles company under the name of the Pasadena Gold Placer Syndicate is preparing, so they state, to build a ditch system and a log dam for restraining débris, preliminary to hydraulicking operations.

UPS AND DOWNS OF A WESTERN GOLD SEEKER

THE publicity recently achieved by Edward L. Doheny in connection with the investigations of certain oil transactions has brought out a phase of this man's remarkable career that is not generally known.

Doheny was born in 1856, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and at that period, the excitement of the gold discovery of '49 in California was still aflame in the minds of the youth of the land. It was therefore natural that Doheny, as a boy, should direct his attention to the search for wealth in the West.

On graduating from high school at the age of seventeen, therefore, he turned his face westward and succeeded in obtaining employment as a surveyor's assistant with a United States geological survey party. This work palled after a while, and he left the expedition, which was engaged in surveying the boundary line between Arizona and New Mexico. He then set out to hunt gold in his own behalf, and for twenty years he roamed the West, seeking his fortune. Sometimes he was flat broke and hungry; at others, luck favored him.

In these years he acquired considerable knowledge—of law, of mining, and of chemistry. Finally, when in Los Angeles, he became interested in oil. He leased a vacant lot at Patton and State Streets and began drilling. His attention had been attracted to the oil-bearing possibilities by seeing a negro with a load of oil exude taken from the locality. The venture, from a small beginning, proved successful, and led to Doheny's holding a dominant position in the oil industry of California.

Next he turned his attention to Mexico, and with Indian guides to show him the way through jungles and forests, he made his first strike near Tampico, where he and his associates eventually acquired several million acres of valuable oil lands. It was recently estimated that this erstwhile gold seeker in the desert places of the West now controls or is at the head of oil and subsidiary corporations having a total capital of one hundred and eighty million dollars.

The Round-Up

DO you love dogs? Course you do. Here's Denis Gill of St. Charles, Illinois. Denis is goin' to tell us a dog story. Bark away, Denis; you may be sure we will all yelp our approval when you get through.

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: I am a regular reader of your magazine, and I love the pictures on the covers. The man who draws those pictures must be well acquainted with Western life. I spent years on the ranches of the West, and I know.

"In a recent issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE I noticed a little article about a dog finding his way back home a hundred miles. It brings to mind a little incident of a dog. I was working on the Cahill Ranch at that time, a big outfit on the Elkhorn River, at Ewing, Nebraska. The foreman was a man named Kirk Minton, a married man with two children, and he had two half-breed collie dogs—one brown and one black and white. One was called Bob, and the other Black Bob.

"Now these dogs were both good cattle dogs, and both very much attached to the children, but they were always out chasing rabbits, so Kirk decided to give Black Bob away. A few days later an old man with a covered wagon stopped at the ranch. He said he was on his way to Morcroft, Wyoming, and he wanted Black Bob. So when he left, Black Bob went with him, tied inside the wagon. Everybody missed Black Bob, especially the little girls, and they always said, 'Black Bob, please come back some time.' About three months later I saw what I thought was a coyote on the plain, loping straight for headquarters, but I soon saw it was a dog, and sure enough, up came Black Bob. He ran around and around the house, and licked the little girls' hands, and barked, and I reckon he was plumb tickled to get back. The next year the old man came back, and he said he kept Bob in the wagon till he got to Morcroft, and the dog would hardly eat, and the first night he turned him loose he headed straight for home.

"When he arrived he was nothing but skin and bone. The boss allowed Black Bob to stay, then, and I reckon the boys were glad, too, for everybody liked Black Bob. The distance Black Bob traveled was easily two hundred and eighty miles, and he'd been taken that distance in a covered wagon."

Now for a little shootin' celebration:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I have read the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for a long time, and don't think I have missed a copy for about five years. If there is a better magazine printed, I have never found it. I like the Round-up especially. When it comes to hand guns, I sit right up and take notice. I notice in a recent number of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE that Tom Brawn and T. H. Wing are romping on L. Norfleet Gilliland because he prefers the six-gun to the automatic, but I believe each person is entitled to his own choice. For my part, I have never owned an automatic pistol that would not jam, and I have owned several of different makes. I have served as a peace officer most of the time for the last twelve or fifteen years, and tried a good many different kinds of guns. I finally settled on a .32-20 S. & W., 38 frame, six-inch barrel, and find it a neat, hard-shooting, accurate gun. I have killed small game up to one hundred and seventeen steps, and for target shooting I can use the common .32 short cartridge. You might say this gives you two guns in one. Now, come right along, you shooters, and give us plenty of gun talk!

"F. H. CLARY.

"R. F. D. No. 3, Morrison, Oklahoma."

Argentine! There's romance in that word, romance and adventure ridin' boundless plains. Here's a nice little talk about Argentine saddles. John Darcman, 108 West Bozeman, Bozeman, Montana, is goin' to give it, and what's more, Jack says if you want to hear more about Argentine, he'll tell us here evenin's or he'll talk to fellows who want to talk to him about that interestin' place, the home of fellows as is in the same business that we are—herdin' cattle.

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: Here is something about saddles used in general in South America, especially in the Argentine. The cowboys of the Argentine, called Gauchos, do not use the kind of saddle we do here in North America, though they use a saddle which they call a *Rican*. It serves both for riding upon and for sleeping on. It consists of two round pads, four inches in diameter and about eighteen or twenty inches long, which are tightly laced together by rawhide the long way.

"When mounting a horse the Gaucho puts several blankets over the horse's back first, then come these pads over the blankets. These are held together by a *cincha* made out of rawhide, about ten inches wide. Finally over all this the Gauchos strap a sheepskin.

"The native tramp of Argentine does not frequently travel by train, as the American or other hobos, but moves from place to place on a horse—never on a mare, as this is against their custom. He uses a *Rican* in preference to a saddle because he can use it also for bedding, and it provides an easy ride, especially for long distances. The *Rican* has no saddle horn, and for roping purposes they attach the lasso on the *cincha* ring. The stirrups are fastened to the *cincha* by means of straps. The *Rican* or Argentine saddle is also extensively used for horses pulling big two-wheeled carts or four-wheeled prairie wagons with wheels twelve to sixteen feet high, and a capacity of a freight car, and these big prairie schooners are generally pulled by thirty to forty horses, of which eight or ten are harnessed and the rest of the horses pull from the *Rican* by a single rope each attached anywhere to the wagon. A *Rican* is the pride of an Argentine Gaucho. I have seen some with silver and gold plating and all kinds of fancy work worth several thousand pesos. If any one of you

wishes more information concerning Argentine, I will gladly furnish same here in the Round-up or personally."

Jack, now havin' galloped back to his place, and curled on his *Rican*, can listen, with the rest of you, to George Krimnitz, Davis, West Route, Oklahoma. George is sure a brother to us when it comes to his feelin' about dogs. Them's our sentiments, George. But listen to George, not to us:

"Boss and Folks: As I have read Western Story Magazine for so long that it has become a habit with me, may I join the circle for a short chat? The talk, by Mrs. P. L. Petrides, in the December 25, 1926, issue, about a dog, sure hits the spot. I believe that several of your readers don't own a horse, but almost every one owns a dog. So let's start telling about dogs and let the horses rest for a while. But, for the love of Mike, please don't start the Airedale argument. I sure think a dog is the best pal. Ain't it sure fine, when you come home from work, or from running your trap line, to have a couple of dog-gone long-eared old hounds, and a pup or two, come bayin' and yelpin' to meet you? They almost knock you down in their eagerness to show you how glad they are to see you and they try, in every way possible, to make you understand that they sure love you. Dad burn it, there ain't anything finer."

THE WEST

And What Do YOU Know About It?

Here is a chance to test, and, at the same time increase your knowledge of the West. Take these questions *now, one* at a time, and write your answers down during the coming week. In the next issue, right here, at the bottom of the last page of the Round-up, you'll find all of the questions in this week's issue correctly answered. Compare your answers with the right ones and mark yourself accordingly. If you have read your Western Story Magazine with care during the past years, you should have little trouble in getting mighty good marks on these questions, for nearly all of them are based on information given in articles and stories that have been printed in Western Story Magazine.

Then get your best-thinking Stetson on, your pencil out, and go to it.

More questions next week.

1. What is the biggest sporting event in Oregon?..... 2. The "gateway to Alaska" is?..... 3. What State claims the golden poppy for its own?..... 4. A vegetable was dug up in 1842 and found to have lumps of gold clinging to its roots. It was an..... 5. Who was the lucky digger?..... 6. From what wild herd that roamed the Western plains did a famous man obtain his moniker?..... 7. Where and what is the only active volcano in the United States?..... 8. Nevada takes its nickname from a precious metal. It is?..... 9. In what States are some of the dwelling places called adobes?..... 10. What's a mesa? .....

Answers to last week's questions: 1. Oregon, the Beaver State. 2. Columbia. 3. California. 4. Irrigation. 5. Protect legs from chapparal. 6. Yes, Washington. 7. Mount Whitney. 8. Redwoods. 9. Rhododendrons. 10. Those who went to California in search of gold.

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

WE, the Owl and the Big Sisters, expect that you'll round up the old crowd of Saturday-night boys some fine evenin', Fagg, and come a-hootin' in the direction of the Old Holla.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE GANG: I notice that some of you are interested in cow talk and range riding. Having been born in the good old Lone Star State and partly reared in the saddle, I reckon that I've had my part of the experiences with coyotes, prairie dogs, and the like. But the thing, it seems to me, that comes to my mind the clearest and stands out above all the other sports of those good old days—ridin' yearlin's included—was our Saturday-night coon hunt. Every Saturday night at least eight or ten of us would get together and head for Pin-Oak Bottom, where we would meet Will Barrington with Old Rattler and Screamer. Those two hounds were real coon dogs. I have run fox and other game in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Indian Territory, Texas, and California, but I have yet to see the dogs that could beat Old Rattler and Screamer when it came to putting up old Zip Coon. Say, talk about music! We boys were wilder than the coon was when those dogs hit a hot trail. Bushes, brambles, or anything that looked like good roads to us, and uphill or down, we went in high gear.

Now, folks, I reckon that I'm takin' up a "right smart" bit of space here, so I had better ring off for this time, but I want to hear from some of you hunters. So just start chirpin'.

JACK FAGG.
1624 Steele Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

You-all remember that little piece called "That Good Old Bronc of Mine?" It was "spoke" by Corporal L. C. Jacobs, of the 12th F. A. Band, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. He's dropped in this mornin' to tell us of "Kate, of the Lazy O."

She's carried me many a weary mile, while I sang to the herds on the plain,
Folks, I'll not try to deny my sorrow, 'cause she'll never do it again.

The boys on the ranch, how she hated 'em, the sight of 'em detest,
But for that I hold nothing against her, 'cause for me she gave her best.

I rode her along, and I rode her hard, but to me she'd stick like a bur,
I'm sorry she's not here to tell you, folks, that she never felt my spur.

Now I know, folks, you didn't all know her, or you'd say the same as I,
That a mare as true as she was, never had ought to die.

From the bush of Central America, folks:

DEAR READERS OF THE HOLLOW TREE: If you were a young engineer in the bush of Central America, wouldn't you like some one to write to you? I think that you would. And so do I, for that is the fix I am in. I have traveled all over the United States, have been in the northern part of Mexico, and am now in the tropics.

I am twenty-two years old and like the outdoors and like to read and write letters. I expect that I could tell any other young person a few interesting things, if he cares to write. We get mail only once a week, so we naturally like to see a bunch of it when it comes. JOSEPH L. PORTMAN.

Care of Truxillo Railroad Co., Eng. Dept., Puerto Castilla, Spanish Honduras, Central America.

Three sea-going pards.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I wonder can you make room for three seagoing pards? Having spent most of our lives on the foam, we have found but little time to meet and make friends, yet we have many leisure hours that could be spent writing—that is, if we had some one to write to!

Would like to hear from any one, anywhere. As luck has favored us in one way—travel—we have all circled the globe more than once. We have also visited most of the tropical islands. Last year we were separated; one crossed the South Seas, one spent a year along the west coast of Africa, and the other east of Suez. We hope that many letters will be awaiting our arrival at the home port.

SMITH, MILLER, AND RICE.

S. S. *Gulf Prince*, Port Arthur, Texas, care of Gulf Refining Co.

Geraldine R. Hapgood, 80 Warner Street, Hudson, Massachusetts, lives not far from the Wayside Inn of Hawthorne fame, and can tell of places of historical interest in and near her vicinity. She would like to hear from sisters everywhere, from abroad as well as in the States, and from Georgia especially.

"I live in the Sacramento Valley in California," says Lula M. Ward, R. F. D. 4, Box 578, Sacramento, California. On the east towers the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains, and to the west the coast range and the Pacific. I love California because you can live out of doors the year round, and I am a great nature lover. In two hours' drive in any direction one can enter a game paradise. Deer, bear, geese, ducks, quail, snipes, and jack rabbits are to be found in abundance. I'd like to exchange snapshots and letters with any one who will write."

"I received my badge, and it sure is a knock-out," says Felix W., of Cicero Ill.

Are you wearing one, too?

If not, send twenty-five cents in stamps or coin to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, and state whether you want the button style for your coat lapel, or the pin.

From Canada way.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a little Canadian girl living in Winnipeg, Canada, and I think that it is the finest place on earth to live—except, of course, on a ranch! I long very much to live on a ranch, but since that is impossible, I attend all the stampedes and rodeos that we have here. I guess you all have heard of Tumbleweed and Midnight—they are the champion broncs of Canada. They sure can sunfish. You should have a chance to see how they can "pile" and make the cowboys "pull leather!"

If there is a cowgirl in Alberta or Arizona who would like to come to the "Peg," just let me know. I wish that all the cowgirls would give me a chance to write to them.

Care of The Tree. THE JINKS KID.

Darce White lives on the Los Alamose Ranch in Otowi, New Mexico, and will be glad to tell the gangsters who write him all about that part of the country. He lives on a Boy Scout ranch, of which his father is the foreman.

One of the Hollow Tree's tomboys:

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a girl who cares more for the out-of-doors than for city life. I'm twenty-one, and last summer I camped out alone in a tent, making several hiking trips in the meantime. On these trips I carried only a knapsack with the barest necessities, and a bed roll in which I slept at night. This consisted of two blankets and a poncho which could be converted into a raincoat in stormy weather. These trips were taken alone, as none of my chums could be coaxed to sleep in my tent, let alone on the ground, with only the stars over their heads.

With such a delightful summer behind, I don't feel that I can stay in the city the entire winter through, and so I wonder if some one won't suggest a place for a tomboy such as myself to spend the rest of the winter. I would like to know the truth about the West, and a winter in the North woods also appeals to me. I would be a pal to any one caring to live as I do, either traveling or spending the winter on a ranch or in a cabin in the big woods.

Don't think that, because I prefer the solitude and beauty of nature and the wholesome outdoor life to the city life that I am dull! I am quite the modern type of girl, and well educated. Won't the tomboys of The Hollow Tree please get in touch with me?

TOMBOY.

Care of The Tree.

I. R. E., care of The Tree, is interested in getting a wolf pup three months old. Who has 'em?

An invitation to trappers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I do a great deal of hunting and trapping, and am always anxious to learn from the "other feller" who has had more experience than I. I'd like to hear from some "big-game hunters" and from some trappers who wouldn't mind answering some of my questions. On the other hand, I'm willing to pass on what I know to the fellow who knows less, and can tell quite a bit about guns, as I'm an expert shot with both rifle and pistol.

I'll answer questions about my part of the West. JOHN R. BULIS.

Walden, Colorado.

Fred Pocha, of Beaufield, Saskatchewan, Canada, is also interested in trapping. He's trapped at Great Bear Lake and on the Churchill River. He's faced dangers in many an adventure, and he'll welcome letters from those who are interested in swapping yarns, and also from those who are looking for information.

Back again to our dear old West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've just finished reading an old-timer's letter in The Hollow Tree, and I want to say that I was born in 1879 and that I've seen some changes in times, too. From the old cradle and binding grain by hand to the combined harvester; from the narrow-gauge railway to the electric trains; from the high-wheel bicycle to the airplane. And many others!

I was born near Goldendale, Washington, between the town and the Indian reservation, one of a large family, and next to the youngest. I remember well how my mother feared for us when my father was out in the fields or away, with the Indians always a close menace.

When I was yet rather small we moved to Silverton, Oregon; and then, in 1888, to McMinnville. Our folks were always farmers, and I, being used to the wilderness country from a youngster, have always liked it. While my home is in town now, I much prefer roughing it to the comforts of city existence. And while I'm not much of a letter writer, I have known a little of the real, old-time West, and am always glad of an opportunity to tell about it. C. H. DODSON.

Box 253, McMinnville, Oregon.

Tom J. Lara, Margarita Ranch, Oceanside, California, is "hankerin' real bad to spend time in writing powwows to lonely Hollow Tree members." He's sure a breezy hombre, and you folks that like to meet up with that sort of pal had better make a grab for the stationery.

"Glad to see you'all lookin' as though you might be wantin' to write a few letters," says Melvin G. Wilson, 215 Winwiddie Avenue, Knoxville, Tennessee. He's twenty-three and has traveled some. Also, he's more than willing to explain "how come the South is nature's own beauty spot."

Puzzling Trails

By *Prosper Buranelli*

WXD SG NSPE JSEQX ZGL
HZQQS DJVQ QVTFHX SGX

After the Round-up is over, each week Prosper Buranelli will select for readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE a couple of tricky problems that will make them get out their pencils and go to it. What kind of puzzle do you like the best? Write and tell us. Send in a puzzle and show us. Maybe you can concoct the one that will make WESTERN STORY readers quit cold.

HERE'S a funny one from Mrs. Gail Hanger, of Fort Madison, Iowa:

"There were a couple of cow-punchers," she writes, "who thought they were pretty smart, that is, until the sheriff's niece came back from college. She had a lot of book learning, and the first thing you know she handed them one she must have got in the mathematics class.

"Well, those two bozos were always fooling around with a deck of cards. The young lady didn't pretend she could play poker as well as they could, but she up and says to them:

" 'Take the face cards and the aces—that makes sixteen cards. Arrange them in a square, four rows of four cards each. But you've got to arrange them so that no two cards of the same kind or the same suit are on the same row up or down.'

"They thought it would be easy, but they never did do it."

Can you?

How'd you like the cipher puzzles of last week? Maybe you didn't. Well, if so, tell me you don't want any more. Meanwhile I'm giving you two more. One is an illustrated cryptogram shown above. The picture stands for a word. Guess what the word is and you will find it in the cipher. Match it up with the cipher word, and that will tell you what several of the cipher letters stand for. Suppose the picture showed a cow, and you guessed COW. Then you would look for a three-letter word in the cipher and write COW over it. Suppose that particular cipher word was XYZ, you would write C over every X in the coded message, O over every Y, and W over every Z. With those letters figured out, you could go ahead and figure out more words.

Now go ahead. You will have a little more work with the following one. You've got to find the clues yourself. Look for one-letter words and double letters. They tell a lot.

S YMKKFKG EFBBET BAFYX BJ BTSNT VJMA RASFK. KJB DSAH, FN FB.

Last week's answers:

Cryptograms:

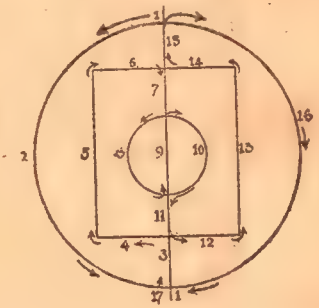
DECIPHERING SECRET WRITING IS A KING OF CUNNING TRICKS AND GAMES.

After you got KING, - - ING must have suggested itself as WRITING and - - NNING as CUNNING.

TELL ME HOW WELL YOU LIKE THESE CIPHER PUZZLES. I WILL BET YOU THINK THEY ARE FINE.

The several double letters were the clue. They were almost certain to be LL. Then in PUZZLES you had: double letter—L—blank—blank. When following a double letter like that L is almost certain to be followed by ES or ER or ED.

Figures and lines:



DESTRUCTION OF WILD FOWL IN THE WEST

THE situation with regard to the wild fowl that make their homes in the marsh and lake regions of the Western States has become precarious during the past year, owing to the rapid evaporation and drainage of many areas in which they made their homes.

When the water in lakes and marshes evaporates, the remaining water has a much higher saline and alkaline content, and becomes poisonous to the birds. By flooding these marshes again, they could be converted from death traps into healthy resorts for the birds. This is the view of Doctor E. W. Nelson, chief of the United States biological survey. In a recent address before the National Game Conference of the American Game Protective Association, he discussed the danger to wild fowl of the West from this cause, as follows:

"In this mainly arid region, drainage, the diversion of water from streams for irrigation, and a rapid evaporation amounting to about four feet a year in some areas, combined with a period of scanty rainfall, extending through the past ten years, have resulted in the disappearance of numberless lakes, ponds and marshes, covering many thousand square miles.

"These vanished water areas vary from small ponds to large areas like Goose Lake, on the border between northeastern California and Oregon. Until within a few years ago, this lake, about fifteen by forty miles in extent, covered an area of six hundred square miles and was twenty-five feet deep in the middle. Its basin is now a bed of drifting dust. Tulare Lake, in the San Joaquin Valley of California, providing some two hundred and fifty miles of ideal wild fowl marshes, is now dry, and its bed is occupied by ranches. Buena Vista Lake, a little farther south, is also dry.

"Concentration of alkaline contents in the water in many areas has made the water poisonous to birds drinking it. This or possibly yet undiscovered disease resulting from overcrowding has brought on an appalling mortality, not only among all wild ducks, but to a lesser extent among geese."

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

RIVERS OF THE WEST—THE ROGUE

THE Rogue River rises on the west slope of the Cascade Range, northwest of Crater Lake, in Oregon, and breaks westward. It traverses the Siskiyou National Forest and, after passing through the famous Rogue River Valley, winds its way in narrow boxlike cañons through the Coast Range to the Pacific Ocean.

Three great mountain ranges inclose the Rogue River watershed, the Umpqua Divide, separating Jackson County from Douglas County and the Umpqua watershed; the main range of the Cascade Mountains on the east, topped by lofty Mount Pitt; and the rugged Siskiyou Mountains on the south, separating Oregon from California. Spurs of all three ranges thrust toward the Rogue River, inclosing fertile valleys from two to ten miles broad.

The western gateway to Crater Lake is through Jackson County, up the picturesque Rogue River Valley over an excellent automobile road. The Rogue River Falls, reached by this road, are celebrated for their beauty, while their numerous rapids and cascades are not only wonderful to gaze upon at a safe distance, but are extremely dangerous to navigate. So that none but the most experienced attempt the feat.

Over a hundred miles of wild, untamed river run through the Cascade Range, where few persons, except lumbermen and market fishermen, venture, for Rogue River does not afford many long, safe stretches, being in the greater part of its course merely a succession of rapids and treacherous whirlpools. The river has a way of disappearing around unlooked-for curves which conceal sudden drops, and none but the most skilled boatmen can handle a craft without disaster at these points. The water often runs still and deep above these danger spots, and only the trained, sensitive ear of the native can tell of the proximity of the fall.

Rogue River Valley was first opened

up by prospectors who gave queer names to the creeks that are tributary to the Rogue, suggestive, no doubt, of then existing conditions. So we have Whisky Creek and Booze Creek, where probably there was a generous supply of "wet goods" in the old days. At some little distance from Whisky Creek is what was once a famous gold digging, Tyee Bar; and near by is the Tyee Bar Rapid, one of the most difficult spots to get a boat through. Many an old-timer gets a cold plunge against his will going through this rapid or dropping the Tyee Falls.

The section of Tyee Bar was a favorite hunting ground with the prospectors, for the "dust" was plentiful around here; and it is said that in the early days over a million dollars' worth of gold was taken off the bar. There are still a few persistent prospectors seeking the precious metal in the vicinity; but the results are not up to expectations.

It was at Battle Bar on the Rogue that the last battle took place between the whites and the Indians of Oregon, and skulls and arrowheads are even now unearthed, from time to time, in the freshets of the river. In many places the Rogue River does not look anything like the dangerous stream that it is. In the Narrows there are places where it is not more than ten feet wide, and it is unsafe for any one to attempt a trip through the waters here without being accompanied by one of the native guides, who knows his Rogue as a city chap knows his own home street.

From Gold Beach a gasoline mail boat goes up Rogue River thirty-two miles to Agness, both in Curry County; and from Agness a trail leads to Bear Camp and Snow Camp, two famous hunting resorts. A fine pack trip from Alameda to Gold Beach is made over the Rogue River Trail. The distance is eighty-seven miles and the scenery is magnificent along the whole route.

Grants Pass Irrigation District, situated along the main line of the Southern Pacific and the California & Oregon Coast Line Railways, has good transportation facilities to the leading markets of the Pacific coast. The district is at the junction of the Pacific and Redwood Highways, two of the greatly traveled roads of the Pacific coast. During the tourist season, thousands of motorists stop at the city of Grants Pass to take advantage of the fine auto camp and excellent bathing resort. This influx creates a big market for small fruits and vegetables, which grow plentifully and well in the Rogue River Valley.

The small farm is popular here, generally running from five to twenty acres, and all are prosperous. The growing season is long; and all varieties of fruits, vegetables, grains and forage crops are produced in profusion in the Grants Pass Irrigation District.

Rogue River, the source of the water supply of the district, has an unfailing flow in the driest seasons. It has never yet gone below the maximum need of the district and there is no possibility of a water shortage. Water is diverted from the river at the Savage Rapid Dam, six miles from the city of Grants Pass, and adjoining the Pacific Highway. On the north side of the river the water goes into the Tokay Canal, which waters the district north of the city of Grants Pass, and certain parts of the city itself. A back-up canal from the Tokay Canal also supplies water for the lands surrounding the town of Rogue River.

Information on the district and what it offers to the prospective settler can be obtained by writing to the Secretary, Grants Pass Irrigation District, Grants Pass, Oregon. And, in regard to the Rogue River Valley and its opportunities, the Grants Pass Chamber of Commerce will be glad to send literature.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found."

It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

SMITH, ROBERT H.—I would like to find you again. I am free now. Leona, care of this magazine.

RUDOLPH, HARRY.—I have tried to find you for so long. Please write to me. Leona, care of this magazine.

ROBISHAW, CARL.—He was last heard from in Modesto, California. Write to Leona, care of this magazine.

GARDNER, ROY.—He was last heard from about thirteen years ago. Will he, his wife, Inez, or one of his children, write to his brother? Benson Gardner, Shoshone, Idaho.

STEWART, EMMET.—He is a carpenter by trade and was at the Ardmore Hotel in Dallas, Texas, in February, 1926. Has folks living in or near Fort Worth, Texas. Please send any information to Miss Douglas, R. 6, Box 165, Dallas, Texas.

ALLEN, JULES VERNE.—He is forty years of age, a barber by trade, and was last heard of in 1907. Has a sister, Ethel, who was last heard of in Waxahatchie, Texas. Any information will be appreciated by Ethel Schram, Box 151, Rutland, North Dakota.

CHITTY, ROBERT B.—He is about fifty years of age and was at one time in Jasper, Florida. Write to L. H. McMerrywell, Rush Springs, Oklahoma.

RAGANS, J. T.—He was living in Georgia. Please communicate with me, as I have a message for you. L. H. McMerrywell, Rush Springs, Oklahoma.

CHOFIELD, MRS. GRACE DARNELL.—She was in Kansas City, Missouri, in June, 1925. Your daughter, whom Herman R. adopted, is now married and anxious to hear from you. Sybil R. W., care of this magazine.

GILBERT, JOSEPH, or any of his living relatives. The last known address was Toledo, Ohio, in 1885. Send all to hear from you. Sybil R. W., care of this magazine.

ADAMS, SUSIE.—She was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, about two years ago. Any information will be appreciated by Mrs. Joseph Rose, 4740 St. Aubin Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

ELLSWORTH, BROWN.—Received your card from Raton, New Mexico. Send your address, as I have good news for you. P. R.

HARVEY, S. P.—He was at the Sherman Hotel, Pocatello, Idaho, and later left for Alexander, Idaho. Any news will be gratefully received by his brother, R. P. Harvey, Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada.

THURTLE, CECIL.—He was sometimes called George Ellison. Has not been heard of for fifteen years. His mother is anxious to hear from him. Mrs. B. Thurtle, 346 Champion Street, Battle Creek, Michigan.

NOTICE.—I would like to hear from any descendants of James Thomas, David or Theodore Ellis. Their mother's maiden name was Mary Craig. I would also like to hear from relatives of Moses Ousley, who was a soldier in the war with Mexico. His sister, Fabinthia Ousley, married James Ellis. Write to D. M. Evinger, Anita, Iowa.

DAVIS, E. R.—He may be in Kane or Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, or Clarksburg, West Virginia. Was an employee of the Thomson Cafe, and was last heard from in Toledo, Ohio, October 4, 1926. His friend is eager to hear from him and would appreciate his present address. Charlie, care of this magazine.

HULING, T. A.—I have been informed that my brother was killed in a riot in Goldfield, Nevada, between 1914 and 1916. He was six feet in height, thirty-five years of age, had dark hair, fair skin, and weighed two hundred and twenty pounds. He had a slight impediment in his speech when excited. Please write to M. M. Huling, Winchester, Tennessee.

SKALICKY, EMIL.—He was in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1913, and lived at 1809 California Street. His mother would like to get in touch with him. Mrs. Skalicky Connell, 606 South State Street, Painesville, Ohio.

JOHNSON, C. E.; RYAN, JULIA; SAILER, RHODA.—They were in New York City in May, 1899. Any one knowing their whereabouts will kindly write to Mary Johnson, care of this magazine.

SCHINK, FRIEDA, ESTHER, and **GUSTAVE.**—At their mother's death they were placed in an orphanage in Berea, Ohio, and were later removed from the orphanage by their father. Please communicate with Thelma Knable, 7912 Hope Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

BERTHALNEN, HATTIE.—She lived in Coffeyville, Kansas, in 1920. Her present address will be appreciated by Roy L. Evans, General Delivery, Cardin, Oklahoma.

WINANS, OSCAR D. and **MARY FRANCES.**—Mary married Jack Sharp. They were living in New Mexico, and were planning to go to the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas. Please write, as there is important news for both parties. E. H. Winans, Tatum, New Mexico.

SMITH, IOLA.—She was last heard of in Denver, Colorado, in September, 1926. Would like to hear from her or any one who knows her. George L. O'Hara, 1407 West Washington Street, Jonesboro, Arkansas.

MILLER, ELSIE.—Her father had a shoe store on Joseph Avenue, near Avenue D, Rochester, New York, twenty years ago. Please send news to Mrs. Roy Dickerson, R. R. I, Ansley, Nebraska.

DAVIS, URIAH.—Please write to your niece. Baby Leonta is O. K. Mrs. Leon J. Farr, 52 River Street, Oneonta, New York.

SHERMAN, RUTH KATHLEEN.—She was last seen in Kansas City, Missouri, about five years ago. Her brother, John A., is my husband. Please write, as there is good news awaiting you. Mildred Sherman, Tampa, Texas.

FAIRALL, MRS. WALTER.—Please send me your address. Mrs. Roy Austin, 425 Van Wagoner Avenue, Flint, Michigan.

KANE, THOMAS EDWARD.—He was on the U. S. S. "Edsoel." Please write to F. S. Hill, General Delivery, Rochester, New York.

CASERTANIO, N.—He is twenty-five years of age, tall, and has dark hair and eyes. Dominick is dead and your mother needs you. Ring of Hearts.

RUELL, EDWARD, of Vancouver, British Columbia, write to Rose Anna Ruell and address to Mrs. Xavier Boisnert, 65 Princeton Avenue, Dover, New Jersey.

GARDNER, MRS. FRANK.—I would like to know where you are, as I have not been able to find you since I left your folks at St. Helena, California, last September. John B. Ledford, Elmira, California.

RODREICK or **RODERICK SAMBRONA, MRS. MARION.**—Was married to Carl Woster Rodreick on June 5, 1921, and was separated six weeks later. She is five feet six inches in height, twenty-five years of age, has black curly hair, brown eyes, fair complexion, and weighed one hundred and twenty pounds. She has a little girl, Anna Daisy, four years old. Last heard of in Tucson, Arizona, in 1924. Please write to Bobby, care of this magazine.

ADAMS, HAROLD, and **AUSTIN, GODFREY ADAMS.**—Your uncle, Julius Adams, and your grandfather, Durand Adams, are waiting to be paid. You will lose under the statute of limitations if you do not claim by representation at once. Send me a power of attorney. R. Adams, 88 Brookline Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

KOM, ORVILLE.—He left home May 17, 1926. Please return home, as mother is very ill and the children are lonesome without you. Mrs. O. Kom, 922 North Main Street, Waterbury, Connecticut.

FELLINGER, HERMAN.—Twenty years ago, on one of his business tours, he stopped at the Southern Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri, where I spoke to him for a few minutes. I would like to get in touch with him. Eugene Fellinger, 2412 Twenty-fourth Street, Port Huron, Michigan.

TOMPKINS, ROBERT D. and **RICHMOND.**—Please get in touch with me. Mrs. Rosa E. Rhinehart, Concordia, Kansas.

CLARK, or **HALLUM, WILLIAM.**—He is fifty years of age. His half sister is anxious to hear from him or his children. Mrs. Rosa Rhinehart, Concordia, Kansas.

DELIS, or DE LIS, JUAN or JOHN.—He is thirty-six years of age, has dark complexion, hair, and eyes. Worked in Austin, Pennsylvania, in the spring of 1919. Please write to an old friend. Pearl.

FOSTER.—My grandfather, George W. Foster, came from New York State to Iowa before the Civil War. My great-grandmother married a second time, but I do not know her last name. She was living in Green County, New York, in 1881. Would like to hear from the descendants of these people. Mrs. A. J. Kulhanch, Box 179, Endicott, Nebraska.

FURGERSON, HERMAN C.—Your sister, Violet, is anxious to hear from you. Write her, or here, and I will advise her. L., Box 2307, Denver, Colorado.

OWENS, HAZEL O.—Last heard from in Oroville, California, in 1925. Please write to your old pal. Hazel Bell, 6023 Caddo Avenue, Cedar Grove, Louisiana.

DADDY.—No welcome home. Am in Cheyenne. Need you badly. Please return or send for me. Pardner.

MAGEE, Miss M. L.—Will any one who knew her at the Millet San Institution write to G. L. M., 1806 Sheldon Avenue, Colorado Springs, Colorado?

HAARA, LEON FRANK.—Blue eyes, blond hair, nearly six feet tall, quiet disposition. Please come back. I love you and will forgive all. Write for your baby's sake. Mrs. Leon Frank Haara, care of Mrs. Lewis Hummel, Cape Charles, Virginia.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from any of the crowd that I met at The Breakers Hotel in Atlantic City during the month of August, 1925. I have news that may be of interest to all of them. J. Allen, 6 West Broadway, Akron, Ohio.

BEANSBRY, JOSEPH GEORGE.—From Fall River, Massachusetts. Last heard of in Bellevue Hospital in 1924. Important news. Communicate with Henri de La Verre, 1854 West 5th Street, Dunellen, New Jersey.

HARRIS, MELVIN.—Please write to me at the same address. Isa.

HUBBARD, Mrs. PEARL.—Maiden name was Baldwin. Was registered at the Seward Hotel, Seattle, Washington, on January 28, 1925. Last-known address was 1521 Market Street, Tacoma, Washington, in October, 1925. Have important news. J. D. Montgomery, care of Fishers' Ranch, Motor Route A, Bend, Oregon.

GUTHRIE, GEORGE.—Fifty-four years old, five feet six inches, dark complexion, one hundred and forty pounds, blind in his right eye, and upper front tooth missing. Has dark hair and blue eyes. Left home April 24, 1926. His wife and children are anxious to get in touch with him. Mrs. George Guthrie, 621 Second Street, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

BUMEN, EDWARD FRANK.—Left Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1922, and last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri. Father paralyzed. Please write or come home. Mrs. Kate Bumen, 821 South Noble Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

TERRY, Mrs. FRANK.—Last heard of in Kokomo, Indiana. Please write to your old friend. Mrs. R. White, 804 South 13th Street, Richmond, Indiana.

CRAWFORD, ALVIN, BUFORD.—Last heard of in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1923. Twenty-four years of age, dark hair, medium height, gray eyes, and large front teeth; one broken. His family is worried. Mrs. A. T. M. Crawford, R. F. D. 2, Pinson, Alabama.

CASTILO, NICK; VOGENBERG, ALLEN; VAUGHAN, GEORGE.—Have you forgotten your old pal? Please write to Tony. Calle Lugano, 510 Colonia Chapultepec Heights, Mexico City, Mexico.

KELSO, JACK.—Please come back to S. L. or write if you still care. I am still working at the same place. F. P.

DEVER, JOE R.—Small build, black hair, brown eyes, wears glasses, aged thirty-one years. Last heard of in North Platte, Nebraska, in September, 1924. Any information will be appreciated by his wife. Write to Ethel Dever, Box 127, La Habra, California.

TUNNELL, J. F.—Better known as "Subway." Last heard from on board U. S. S. "Maumee," in 1919. Write to Harry Massie, 708 Showers Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of the boys who served on board the U. S. S. "Maumee," from 1917 to 1919. Harry Massie, 708 Showers Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

ADAMS, BAILY.—Was at Corcoran, California. His brother would like to hear from him. Walter Adams, Lander, Wyoming.

"CHECKERS;" BUCKLEY, MILT; THOMAS, DON.—I would like to hear from them and others. Last seen in Los Gatos, California, about 1915. Dick, Box 386, Palo Alto, California.

BRAND, FRANK.—Best wishes for the holidays. If you can spare the time drop a line. Will await reply. Ceil.

KARY, BASCO.—Hasn't been seen for four years. Write to your old friend. Bondy, Pleasant Mills, Indiana.

GREEN, MATTHEW.—Left Somerville, Georgia, about 1883, to live in Texas. Write to your old friend. Henry Kynes, Las Uvas Rancho, R., Morgan Hill, California.

JONES, FLOYD.—Your mother is anxious to hear from you. Write to her at Grover, Pennsylvania, or to Box 523, Eureka, California.

GREEN, Mrs. EDNA BROWN.—Wife of Wilbur Green, brakeman on the Union Pacific, North Platte, Nebraska, in 1922. Please write to Jack K., care of this magazine.

ALEXANDER, CAR.—Last heard of in New York. Was supposed to have entered the navy at Los Angeles, California. Please write to Naomi Alexander, Diboll, Texas.

KRAMER, EDWARD.—Fourteen years old, blond hair, blue eyes, slender. Went on a hike to Florida on September 9, 1926. Probably in or near Tampa during hurricane. Was also at Lake City and Sulphur Springs. Write to Mrs. E. T. Kramer, 7629 Hamilton Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

BUSTER, Mrs. ELLA.—Her maiden name was Collins. Born and raised in Somerset, Kentucky, and was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1917. Twenty-eight years old, has dark-red hair and brown eyes. Write, as there is important news for you. George Collins, Southern Hotel, Seattle, Washington.

BROWN, LEVI FRANCIS.—Born January 6, 1847, Clyde, New York. Married Jane A. Susk, January 3, 1871. Had three children, Matilda, Minnie, and Bertha. Minnie is still living. Mother died in 1907. Would like to get in touch with any one knowing any of them. Minnie B. B., care of this magazine.

GIBLIN, MARTHA.—In San Francisco, California, in 1915. There is an estate to be settled in your name. John E. Trulley Company, 653 119th Street, Whiting, Indiana.

BURTON, ANDREW B.—Would like to get in touch with my father's people. His brothers were Mark, Joe, and Henry, and were in New Jersey the last time they were seen. J. W. A. Burton, 300 Market Street, Pratt City, Alabama.

THAY, T. B.—Born in Arkansas forty years ago. Had dark hair and eyes, and weighed one hundred and sixty pounds. Last heard from in Crocket, Texas. Would like to hear from him or any of his folks. Mrs. G. T. Hynds, Box 392, Nederland, Texas.

ALLISON or SMITH, Mrs. DORA.—Has four children, Eva, Mildred, Dorothy, and George. Formerly of Klamath Falls, Oregon, and Dunsmuir, California. Information will be appreciated. Jessie Williams, 2153 West Emerson Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

FROST, Miss THELMA.—Formerly at the Service Club at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. She is acquainted in Dows, Iowa. Is an excellent singer, and has sung over the radio. Was acquainted with a former Private Harold Belnap of the Third Infantry. Write to Musician, care of this magazine.

HOOPER, Mrs. MARGARET.—Matron at the Service Club at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Her maiden name was Margaret Lovell. Musician, care of this magazine.

DUBOIS, EMILE M.—Formerly at 42 Rue de D'Marle, Boulogne, Sur Mer, France. He was employed by M. Camille Duflas at the Cheveaux Boucherie. Write to Musician, care of this magazine.

PURCELL, MARY.—Last heard of in Wichita, Kansas, thirty-five years ago. Her son was adopted from her when six weeks old. Write, as there is important news. Mrs. C. H. D., care of this magazine.

McDANIELS, EARL J.—Went overseas and came back in 1919 to go to Fox Hills, New York. Last heard from at Amarillo, Texas, in 1921. His home used to be in Vernon and Odell, Texas. Write to Williams, care of this magazine.

PARKS, WILFRED A.—Was soldier in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1922. Married in New York in 1920. Write to Williams, care of this magazine.

PETERSON, Mrs. CHRYSTAL LOUDER.—Once lived in Missouri, then in California, and later in Portland, Oregon. Last heard of in Seattle, Washington. Your old friend, Hazel E., would like to hear from you. Write to Mrs. D. L. Siter, R. 1, Box 63, Lizard, Oregon.

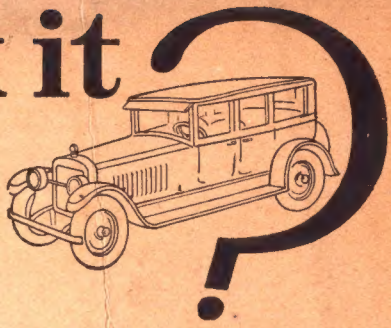
KAY.—Mommia Falline cries for you. Word from you will save her life. Grandfather passed away. Dad.

FOXY THE WAIF.—All is forgiven. Come home. Are you still in Florida? Dad.

ATTENTION.—Men of the 76th M. G. T. C. stationed at Camp Hancock, Georgia, in 1918. Please write an old pal, who needs your help. Joe W. Watson, 410 Poalk Street, Amarillo, Texas.

FRANCIS, H. L. B.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois. Write to Lillian, care of this magazine.

Can you fix it



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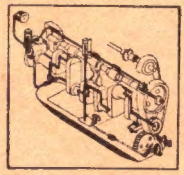

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